THE YOUTH TRANSITIONS STUDY
FINAL REPORT

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Pathways to Resilience and
Youth Transitions Research

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INTRODUCTION

At a population level, most youth in Aotearoa New Zealand make a more or less successful, unproblematic transition through adolescence and into adulthood (Clark, et al., 2013). However, these broad patterns obscure the fragile and precarious journeys that a subsection of the youth population experience (McLeod & Tumen, 2017). These youth are not a random, or difficult to identify subgroup of the adolescent population. Indeed, they are often known to the people who work in the systems mandated to support and educate them. Yet frequently they will have exited school prematurely, and while they will have spent a lot of time engaged in service systems these interventions have often had little positive impact. Their life-time institutional records and the related professional engagement with them will have repeatedly highlighted the likelihood that a successful transition through adolescence and into adulthood will be a substantial challenge for them. However, despite this institutional knowledge, these youth will often have faced this transition alone. While it may have interrupted a process of deterioration for a time, professional intervention in the lives of these youth will not have consistently created a pathway to better outcomes. Indeed, it may actually have exacerbated the challenges youth faced (Hood, 2014; Horwath & Morrison, 2007; Kapp, Petr, Robbins & Choi, 2013). This raises two questions:

1. When young people come into adolescence at a disadvantage, what factors make the most difference to their capacity to make a successful transition? and,

2. How can systems and the professionals working within them best respond to the challenges these youth face?

The Youth Transitions Research examined these two questions. It did this by gathering stories of transition of a large number of young people who were exceptionally vulnerable. It documents the challenges they confronted, the responses they made, and the people and systems that were helpful and those that were not. It also sheds light on the way they came to see themselves and the possibilities that were open to them. The research intended to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of 'what it is like' to find yourself in the challenging circumstances these youth faced, and 'what other people can do to help'. This report draws together what was learned from following this cohort of exceptionally vulnerable youth for six years. It focuses in particular on drawing out lessons for service provision and policy.

The report is divided into seven substantive sections. The first provides a brief overview of the key areas of thinking that informed the study to situate the research in its wider context. This is followed by a section which outlines the methodology of the study. Following this, a general profile is provided of the young people. The fourth section explores in detail the educational experiences of the youth. The fifth considers their employment experiences. The sixth addresses their experiences with formal support services. The final section provides a conclusion and presents a set of practice principles for enhancing interventions with exceptionally vulnerable young people. Each substantive section of this report (Sections four-six) contains detailed discussion of the wider literature as well as presentation and discussion of findings from both the surveys and the qualitative interviews.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Youth research has increasingly focused its attention on the idea of transitions. Transitions also occupy the attention of those in the policy and service delivery communities who are concerned with vulnerable young people (EGRIS, 2001). The pathway from childhood to adulthood is now understood to be heterogeneous and influenced by macro-level factors such as political, social and economic environments, the relationships youth form with others as well as changes within individual young people themselves. Further, transitions are now recognised as comprising more than simply the move from school to work (Aaltonen, 2013; Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007; EGRIS, 2001). Accordingly, contemporary work on adolescent transitions considers both individual-level maturational processes as well as the impact of relational and contextual factors. As Roberts (2010, 146) has observed:

> …whereas once young people could be viewed as being on trains being hurled across a set track to some final destination, they are now making their journey to adulthood in a car, navigating their own way. However, political rhetoric espousing equality of opportunity in a meritocratic society obscures the fact that 'cars' of varying quality and reliability are unevenly distributed, that there is variable access to different standards of 'road', and that while many are supplied with 'maps', a differential ability to read them exists [Williamson, 2006, 4]. Understanding youth in this way allows us to account for the fact that while many young people go through this process without too many problems, a significant minority seemingly remain more prone to risk and vulnerability. Instead of a smooth road, in relation to employment, housing and relationship biographies, some encounter periods of 'break down', have collisions, find themselves in 'cul-de-sacs' or arrive at 'inappropriate destinations'.

Given the focus on changes over time, the concept of transitions fits well with the developmental focus of adolescent and emerging adulthood research. What transitions research adds to these bodies of work is a concern to move beyond individual normative maturational processes to account for the non-linear, unpredictable and uncertain nature of contemporary youth transitions. What this means for research, policy and programme development is that explanations need to take account of multiple and diverse experiences that are shaped not only by individual factors and biological maturational processes but by larger social, political and economic forces, many of which are now global in nature (Furlong, Woodman & Wyn, 2011; Morrow, 2013).

Indeed, internationally there is a growing concern among policymakers and practitioners that research has not generated the subtle and nuanced information required to capture these diverse realities that comprise contemporary youth transitions. This means that policies and interventions do not adequately respond to the complex needs of young people, particularly those who are exposed to adverse circumstances (Gilbert, Farrand & Lankshear, 2013; Hardgrove, McDowell & Rootham, 2015; Hung & Appleton, 2016; McLean, Wood & Breen, 2013; Rogers, 2011; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, 2015). Indeed, while there has been much policy focus on the risks presented by vulnerable youth, and considerable media attention is devoted to their activities, often these young people live precarious lives and face uncertain futures. Unless policy and service delivery directly address the wider structural causes of inequality and marginalisation these young people will continue to approach adulthood at serious disadvantage and are unlikely ever to achieve to their potential, raising serious issues around equity and fairness.

Thomson and colleagues have suggested the notion of transition strands helps to conceptualise contemporary youth transitions (Thomson et al., 2002). These strands comprise factors such as education, employment, training, housing, family, income, consumption and relationships (Coles, 1995). Young people's progress along these various strands occurs at different rates, sometimes moving forwards, sometimes backwards. Central to understanding transitions, then, are ideas of diversity and fluidity such that transitions are influenced by a:

> subtle interplay of individual agency, circumstance and social structure (Irwin, 1995; Wyn and White, 1998). The relationship between timing, opportunity and identity lies at the heart of these contemporary concerns (Thomson et al., 2002, 336).

This approach to thinking about transitions highlights the importance of the subjective experience of movement along these multiple, often fragmented strands. The movement along these strands are shaped by individual action, actions of others and social/structural forces that are largely beyond the control of individual young people. In this connection, ideas such as "cruel optimism" (see for example, Berlant, 2006, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015) have been used to help explain the complexities and challenges of living in conditions that are "fraught with structural obstacles that thwart even the most reasonable strategies for pursuing futures hopefully" (Zipin et al., 2015, 228).

These ways of understanding transitions are helpful as they offer an alternative to dominant discourses of youth transitions that position youth as fully autonomous actors. In particular, the impact of 40 years of structural transformation and neo-liberal policies that have disrupted social, political and economic stability and security and contributed to rising inequality (Berlant, 2011) need to be considered alongside the individual choices and actions that young people make. Suggestions that transition challenges can be solved simply by 'raising aspirations' of youth simplify and mute the complexities of the lives of these young people (Zipin et al, 2015).

In this connection, while youth studies have historically emphasised ideas of personal agency, there is growing recognition that agency is bounded, or limited by structural factors that young people are not able to control (Aaltonen, 2013; Evans, 2002). In order to fully understand these complexities Zipin and colleagues (2015) call for a multi-levelled analysis that involves analysis of policy, ideology, family and community conditions as well as the lived experiences of young people. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1992) and Bauman (2004) they examine the interaction between social and economic conditions and policies and the ways in which these play out in the everyday lives of young people. Central to this analysis is the challenge of deficit discourses that displace ideas of societal responsibility by an individualism that blames youth for not being able to overcome the adverse conditions over which they have little control and at the same time, which holds them responsible for creating their own wellbeing (Zipin et al., 2015,228 - 229). Within such discourses, structural obstacles to effecting change and achieving positive outcomes are downplayed and individuals are blamed for 'wasted lives' and a lack of commitment to creating change (Bauman, 2004).

The important points to note in this regard are that the somewhat abstract notion of transition can oversimplify a complex experience. While it is important that understandings of transition recognise young people's agency and that their experiences and understandings of their situations are accorded priority, equally the fact that young people's autonomy is constrained and influenced by the actions of others, and by forces beyond their control needs to be recognised. This interplay of individual, relational and structural factors shapes individual young people's transitions through adolescence and into adulthood. As Thomson and colleagues note (2002, 338):

> Young people may respond to and seek solutions to these experiences at an individual level, but their life chances remain highly structured and highly predictable.

This means that risk and vulnerability is not evenly distributed across the population of youth.

VULNERABILITY

In Aotearoa New Zealand, as in other western nations, there is growing interest in the prospects for young people who have been left behind as a result of decades of social and economic reform. While macro-economic and social indicators might indicate whole nations are faring reasonably well, at a more granular level, it is clear that small pockets of the population often capture social and economic gains, leaving others behind. The groups that most often miss out are the children of poor to low-middle income families/whānau and within this, of course there is inequality based around ethnicity. As the children of these whānau/families grow, they carry the risk burdens associated with poverty and take the disadvantages that have been visited upon them as a result of the families/ whānau they were born into, into adulthood. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, which historically has claimed to be a nation based on ideas of fairness, the prospects for these youth are no better than they are in other nations with less of a historical commitment to ideologies of equity and fairness. Indeed, health and wellbeing indicators suggest these young people carry significant burdens that have never been addressed. The current research intended to generate greater understanding not only of the needs these youth have, but also of how best our systems of care and intervention can assist these youth on their journeys to adulthood.

A range of terms have been used to describe the youth who are the focus of this research, such as 'hidden' (Bonevski, et al., 2014; Vangeepuram, Townsend, Arniella, Goytia & Horowitz, 2016), 'hard to reach' (Abrams, 2010),'at risk' (Borek, Allison & Cáceres, 2010), 'minority' (Shahabi et al., 2011), and 'vulnerable' or 'marginalised' (Taylor, 2009; Ward & Henderson, 2003). What the youth so labelled share in common are substantial challenges in making a safe transition to prosocial adult lives because of the risk burdens, that they have carried from childhood.

The term 'vulnerable' is used to refer to the youth who participated in the current research programme. There are debates about the use of this term. For instance, concerns have been expressed that there is no commonly agreed definition of the characteristics that comprise vulnerability (Rizvi, 2015). There is also debate about its usefulness as a concept because of its ambiguity and stigmatising potential (Becroft, 2016; Cole, 2016; Foster & Spencer, 2011). Some have argued for a universal definition of vulnerability based on the principle that by virtue of their dependence, all youth are inherently vulnerable (Daniels, 2010). Others suggest that the category should only be applied to sub-groups of youth with atypically high levels of risk across a broad range of indicators; the accumulation of this risk being the defining feature of vulnerability (Gorur, 2015; Felitti et al., 2014; Smyth, 2013; Walker & Donaldson, 2010).

In the current study, this latter approach formed the basis for the decision to use the term vulnerable to refer to the youth who participated in the research. These youth were vulnerable by virtue of their exposure to atypically high, non-normative levels of risk across multiple life domains that compromised their capacity to reach their full potential. Another aspect of the vulnerability of these youth related to the fact that many of the risks they confronted were beyond the direct control of youth themselves. This accentuated their vulnerability because they needed to rely on adults (many of whom were not willing or able to protect them) to help them positively address these multiple challenges. In this way, the definition of vulnerability adopted here has two key elements: high levels of complex risks and reduced likelihood of positive outcomes (Gorur, 2015). This was important because of the focus of the research on identifying the best approaches to resourcing and supporting these youth to create pathways to less risky, more successful futures (Munford & Sanders, 2016a). While the weight of evidence is clear; high levels of chronic exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACE) makes children and young people vulnerable to poor outcomes, the evidence regarding the types of interventions that offer these youth the best opportunities to achieve positive outcomes is considerably less so (Berzin, 2010; Metzler, Merrick, Klevens, Ports & Ford, 2017; Walker & Donaldson, 2010).

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Bessant (2018) has argued that the contemporary field of youth research is a contested space where varying theoretical perspectives and different disciplines all vie for dominance. In this context, differing perspectives on class, generation, gender, identity, risk, the role of government as well as the more perennial structure versus agency debate all collide and are argued out by sociologists, political scientists, economists, historians, policy researchers and practitioners. Bessant proposes that youth studies adopt a relational account of how change and persistence co-exist throughout adolescence. In this regard, Positive Youth Development theory (PYD) has an important contribution to make to the development of our understanding of how young people can develop and thrive. PYD draws on venerable theoretical roots in relational developmental systems meta theory, ecological systems theory and developmental contextualism (Lerneret al., 2019; Lerner, Sparks & McCubbin, 1999; Neal & Neal, 2013). These larger bodies of work allow PYD to draw upon both biological and developmental accounts, taking a life course perspective where development is understood to occur out of the interaction between the individual and the environment; the person<->environment exchange (Overton, 2010). In relation to the population of youth who are the focus of the current study, PYD is valuable because it redefines marginalised and disadvantaged youth so that rather than problems to be fixed they are seen as resourceful and their actions are understood as attempts to take control of their circumstances (Bottrell, 2009; Haw, 2010). As Lerner (2005, 10-11) suggests the reframing of adolescence offered by PYD shifts the focus so that young people are no longer understood as being:

> … broken, in need of psychosocial repair, or [as] problems to be managed (Roth, Brookes-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1998). Rather, all youth are seen as resources to be developed.

Vulnerable youth are thus understood as being exposed to risks in their environments that compromise their capacity to develop well and thrive, rather than difficult, dysfunctional or disordered youth who need adults to somehow 'fix' them.

While the initial impetus for the development of PYD was the need to understand normative development, interventions using PYD principles make a valuable contribution to interventions with vulnerable youth who have been exposed to multiple risks during childhood (Gardner, Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Scales, Benson & Mannes, 2006). Because of the centrality of independence in adolescent development, the PYD emphasis on encouraging youth to exercise personal agency works well in interventions with vulnerable adolescents (Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, Jahromi, Zeiders, 2015). This is because vulnerable youth often have had compressed childhoods and accelerated autonomy transitions (Stein, Ward & Courtney, 2011). These youth of necessity learn to make key decisions on their own from a young age, and so interventions that encourage and support youth making their own decisions are likely to be more acceptable than interventions that seek to direct and control.

The PYD lens redefines the risks these youth confront as zones of challenge to which, if relevant and meaningful resources are made available, positive change will ensue. This does not mean that risks should be dismissed or diminished, but rather that they must be understood as comprising only one part of a young person's social ecology. PYD places a priority upon young people's strengths and capacities while remaining mindful of the risks and challenges youth face (Cheon, 2008; Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988). In this way, professional practice is situated as an adjunct to the resources and supports already present in the young person's world (Munford & Sanders, 2015b; Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong & Van de Vijver, 2013). PYD thus brings an optimistic orientation and vocabulary that speaks of potential and recognises the plasticity of human development, even in the face of significant adversity.

As part of relational developmental systems theories, PYD focuses attention on the young person in their social and cultural context (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). It recognises that there are diverse pathways through adolescence and that these pathways reflect the dynamic interplay between each young person's own individual characteristics, the nature and quality of the relationships they have access to and the resources and risks around them, many of which may be beyond their direct control. This ecological emphasis of PYD calls for interventions that are respectful of and responsive to the uniqueness of each youth and their family/whānau and that recognises structural and other constraints on the young person. By adapting the intervention in response to the realities of youth circumstances the chances that interventions will be meaningful and relevant are increased (Bottrell, 2009). PYD theory also highlights the importance of careful relationship building.

The idea of relationship building as a specific piece of work had been developed in the social work field (see for example, Ruch, Turney & Ward, 2010). Central arguments here are the importance of communication, sensitivity to culture and context, and consistency and continuity in practices. Relationship building focuses attention on the need to draw young people into the support process in ways that engage them as partners in a common enterprise. There is a growing evidence-base that links relational practices such as these with positive change because of this emphasis upon interactions that are respectful, relevant and meaningful (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003; Gardner, Roth, Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Grossman et al., 2002; Heinze, Hernandez Jozefowicz & Toro, 2010; Larson, Hanson & Moneta, 2006; Scales et al., 2006; Urban, Lewin-Bizan & Lerner, 2009). When professionals form positive relationships, encourage active client involvement and demonstrate respect for the individual, family/whānau and culture, good outcomes are achieved regardless of the individual characteristics and circumstances of youth (Bastiaanssen, Delsing, Kroes, Engels & Veerman, 2014; DuMont, Widom & Czaja, 2007; Ungar et al., 2013). While not the only relevant factor in terms of adolescent wellbeing, for instance access to material resources (Berzin & De Marco, 2010; Ungar et al., 2008) also play an important role, relationships are nonetheless a critical dimension of the adolescent developmental project (Lerner, 2005). When young people have mutually beneficial relationships with the people and institutions in their social world they thrive and contribute (Heinze, 2013). This applies equally to youth who have many supportive resources as it does to those who are facing significant challenges.

In this context, a key task for practitioners is to locate the people who hold potential for positive growth and development. Positive youth development occurs when opportunities are made available to youth in meaningful ways and when relationships provide support to young people to develop their own unique capacities and abilities. PYD provides a way of understanding the lives of vulnerable youth that emphasises their skills and capacities to adapt to challenging circumstances as well as the wisdom they have gained in living challenging lives. These capacities are key resources professionals draw upon when providing support (Case, 2006). When interventions build upon the resources around youth in these ways, service involvement becomes a potential resilience resource, forming part of a facilitative ecology around vulnerable youth (Berzin, 2010; Mitchell, 2011).

PYD does not, however, ignore the risks and challenges at-risk youth confront, the difficulties they face in adapting positively, nor the troubling behaviours they may exhibit. What it offers is a way of understanding these risks as only one part of a young person's social ecology. Solutions are found when the risks are understood and addressed, but crucially, the positive and resourceful dimensions of youth lives are drawn into the intervention and the young person is actively involved in the process of change.

These three conceptual strands (transitions, vulnerability and positive youth development) provided the conceptual structure for this research. The next section outlines the study methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods are increasingly used in social research because by combining both approaches research gains the benefits of each while mitigating their individual weaknesses (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). In the field of youth studies in general, and particularly in youth transitions research, the case has been made that mixed methods are required in order to generate full accounts of transition processes so that research can properly inform the development of effective policies and programmes. Accordingly, a mixed-methodology was chosen for this research.

The method involved a survey repeated at three annual intervals to trace general patterns in transition experiences over time, highlighting commonalities across the sample as well as pinpointing any differences between subgroups. Following this, three qualitative interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of these youth and the adults who supported them. In this way, the significance of general patterns in the transition experience could be identified, differences between subgroups of youth pinpointed, and these could then be contextualised by detailed examination of individual case stories.

ETHICS

The Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved the research prior to fieldwork commencing (MUHEC approval 08/33; 09/67). In addition to this University Ethical approval, ethical approval was secured from any organisation that assisted with recruitment (see below). This included Research Access Committee (RAC) approval from the Ministry of Social Development, approval from the Department of Corrections, District Health Boards, as well as approvals from schools and a wide range of NGO (non-governmental organisations) that supported the research. Ethics protocols covered the protection of participant identity and safe storage of data. They included responsibilities of researchers should they become aware of risks of harm to participants and detailed procedures to be adopted in any such cases. Protocols detailed that young people could stop interviews at any time if they were finding the interview difficult and provided processes for linking young people to supportive services. Clear protocols were in place for managing sensitive issues such as when a young person disclosed that they were unsafe (see below). All questionnaires and interview transcripts were stored in locked cabinets in specified research offices, which were also locked. Consent forms were stored separately from these documents. All electronic data was stored on secure, password-protected servers that researchers alone could access.

There are debates about whether or not young people facing high levels of adversity should be included in research because interviews may trigger emotional responses and memories of past traumatic events making participation in research yet another burden upon them (Ward & Henderson, 2003). While being cognisant of these important issues, the current research embraced the principle that young people have a right to be heard and to make their own decisions about participating in research, given that appropriate protections and supports are put in place around them (Kearns, 2014). The research used Positive Youth Development perspectives and accordingly, avoiding stereotypical views of young people as being ill-equipped and unable to make their own decisions about participation was important. A key principle in the research was recognising youth "competence and autonomy" (Kearns, 2014, 507) and thus giving youth choice about participating in the study was a priority. The research was committed to an ethic of care; this meant giving young people the opportunity to speak of their own experiences and then placed responsibilities on researchers to respect this information and treat it with care (Munford, Sanders, Mirfin-Veitch & Condor, 2008). The ethics application sought and the research was given approval for young people to have the capacity to give their own consent, even when they were minors. In situations where the organisations from which youth were recruited (see below) required parental consent, this was obtained in addition to youth consent. Youth could not participate if parents withheld consent, but in practice, this did not happen.

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

A sequential design of nested samples was used (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), beginning with the quantitative phase through which 593 vulnerable youth were recruited (see Table 1) from five locations (the greater Auckland metropolitan area, Palmerston North, rural Horowhenua and Kāpiti, the greater Wellington metropolitan area and Dunedin city). From this sample, a qualitative cohort of 107 was selected that was broadly representative of the larger sample on age, gender and ethnicity.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the vulnerable and comparison groups at Time 1

	Vulnerable group		Comparison group		P
	N	%	N	%	
Gender					0.906
Female	245	41.30	247	41.70	
Male	348	58.70	346	58.30	
Age					0.068
15 years and under	327	55.10	358	60.40	
16+ years	266	44.90	235	39.60	
Prioritised Ethnicity					0.140
Māori	281	47.40	242	40.80	
Pasifika	117	19.70	136	22.90	
NZ Pākehā	185	31.20	202	34.10	
Other	10	1.70	13	2.20	
Total	593	100.00	593	100.00	

The research has four linked components:

1. A survey administered three times at approximately annual intervals to 593 youth in the vulnerable group (see below, sampling and recruitment) of youth who were aged between 12 and 17 years at the time of the first administration;

2. A survey administered once to a comparison group of 593 youth who were aged between 12 and 17 years, and who provided a baseline for comparison purposes;

3. Qualitative interviews with the subset of the 107 vulnerable group youth completed three times at approximately annual intervals following the last survey;

4. Qualitative interviews administered three times at approximately annual intervals with a subset of adults nominated by vulnerable group youth as knowing the most about them (PMK, or person most knowledgeable).

SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

Random and probability sampling has dominated the research landscape for decades, however, it is increasingly recognised that these approaches do not consistently generate sufficient numbers of vulnerable individuals to allow valid and reliable conclusions to be drawn about their experiences (Bonevski et al., 2014). This has led to a lack of confidence that findings using these approaches can meaningfully inform policy and programme development (Bonevski et al., 2014). As a result, researchers are increasingly adopting 'non-traditional' sampling strategies so that valid and meaningful data can be generated concerning the experiences of groups such as the vulnerable youth who are the focus of this research.

Given the above, a community saturation approach to recruitment was adopted in this research (Bowen, 2008). This involved negotiating and securing the support of all, or most of the service providers who worked with the target population of youth in the five locations in which the research was based (see above). Working from the largest to the smallest organisation in each locality researchers systematically examined client files to identify youth who met the selection criteria (see below). This process continued with each organisation until no new names were generated. The initial approach to youth regarding potential participation was made by staff from each organisation to ascertain their willingness to meet with a researcher to discuss their potential participation. Following this, youth who were open to the idea of participating met with a researcher to discuss the research and give consent. In situations involving group programmes, such as alternative education or group-based support programmes, researchers met with the whole group to explain the research and youth filled in an 'indication of interest' form, sealed it in an envelope and returned it to the researchers. Youth could return a blank form if they did not wish to participate so that no-one would know whether or not they were involved in the research. Researchers then individually followed up youth who indicated interest to explain the research, give the information sheet and secure consent. The interview might be completed at this point, or subsequent to this, depending on youth preferences. In all cases, organisations were not aware of which youth had eventually completed questionnaires or interviews.

The study involved two groups of youth, and a group of adult PMK (in the qualitative phase). The first group (the vulnerable group) were purposefully selected based on:

a) their involvement as clients in the following service systems: mental health, youth justice, child welfare and educational systems (other than participation in mainstream classrooms), during the six months prior to participating in the study and

b) their exposure to elevated risks during childhood. In the context of this study, this was defined as a history of exposure to atypical levels of adversity and trauma during childhood/early adolescence (Metzler et al., 2017). This included high levels of exposure to harm from family, community, and/or school, presenting with challenging behaviours, living independently while still a minor or being homeless (Munford & Sanders, 2017a).

Based on published research, it was reasoned that this combination of involvement in services and the presence of elevated risks, made the youth vulnerable to poor psychosocial outcomes (Mitchell, 2011; Sanders, Munford, Leibenberg, & Ungar, 2014).

For purposes of baseline comparison, a second group of youth were also surveyed at Time 1. This group, the comparison group, was recruited from the same communities as the vulnerable group and selected on the basis of similar demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender and ethnicity). To be allocated to the comparison group youth were required to not be currently involved in services, even though they came from the same neighbourhoods as youth in the vulnerable group, and to not be exposed to the elevated risks noted above.

DATA COLLECTION

Both the survey and qualitative interviews built on an earlier study, the Pathways to Resilience Research Programme (see: http://www.youthsay.co.nz/massey). For the survey, the Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure (PYRM; www.resilienceproject.org) was adapted to facilitate the longitudinal perspective of the current study. The qualitative interview schedule was developed in conjunction with youth and end-user partners. It took a life-story approach with participants over the three annual interviews. These interviews covered a range of topics including significant life events, risks and resources, experiences of family, school, formal services, employment, community/neighbourhood, relationships, and the young person's insights into how they coped with challenges and what assisted them through their transitions. Pretesting was undertaken for both survey and qualitative interviews to confirm acceptability to youth and to ensure that the questions enabled capture of the data required to answer the research questions.

Interviewers participated in a day-long training programme prior to undertaking interviews. This training covered meaning and intent of questions, and emphasised strategies to support youth to stay engaged with both questionnaire completion and the qualitative interviews. Training also covered the ethics-approved protocols for managing situations where youth might disclose that they were unsafe, subject to some form of abuse, or where the interview triggered painful memories or emotional responses. These protocols included, stopping the interview if it was causing distress and assisting youth to find support, providing information about organisations that youth could contact for ongoing support, including, where appropriate, the organisation that referred them into the study. Interviewers were not able to provide support to youth, beyond an empathic approach during the interview, however they were able to support youth to make contact with psycho-social services if they wished support to do this. Protocols included the interviewer advising youth that if they disclosed immediate risks to their own safety or that of someone else, that the interviewer would need to refer to the appropriate authority and that at that point the interview might need to stop. Interviewers participated in ongoing debriefing processes to ensure that they were following the ethical procedures approved for the study and that any potential ethical issues were immediately dealt with and resolved.

Interviews were set up via texting, phone calls, email and Facebook private messaging. Once the young people identified the PMK to be interviewed, these people were contacted and the same consent procedures were followed. Young people and their PMK determined the time and location of their interviews. All interviews began with a discussion about the research and secured informed consent. The surveys were administered in one-on-one situations for youth from the vulnerable group, or in small groups of 2-3 youth at a time. Comparison group youth were often interviewed in larger groups, such as classes at school, and in these situations, four or five interviewers provided support to youth to complete the survey instrument. All qualitative interviews (youth and PMK) were conducted individually. Incentives were not provided, but at the end of each interview (lasting up to 45 (survey) and 90 minutes (qualitative)) youth were offered a $20 voucher of their choice to thank them for their participation, and food was also provided at each interview. After each interview, the interviewer completed a brief case summary which provided an overview of the interview and the issues the young person talked about. This served as an aide-memoire for the next interview that could be drawn on to re-establish rapport.

THE SURVEY

The survey was designed to trace patterns of change for vulnerable youth as they transitioned to young adulthood. In addition to demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity and parenthood status), it asked a range of questions concerning youth assessments of their own progress towards adulthood, individual risks and resources, practical skills, employment status, employment goals and skills, relationships with family and friends, access to supportive adult relationships, school engagement and academic achievements, lifetime service use patterns, satisfaction with services and access to community supports and resources. Many of the questions were part of validated scales and in other cases, where the data supported this, composite scores were created that reflected particular domains of youth lives.

With interviewer support, youth completed paper versions of the questionnaire. These were checked for accuracy and completeness. They were returned to the interviewer for clarification where issues were identified. Questionnaires were then entered into an access database and double-checked for accuracy. Data was then exported into various statistical packages for analysis.

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND MEASURES

Demographic Factors

Gender – male and female options were given.
Age – was self-reported.

Ethnicity – Using census categories, participants self-selected all the ethnicities that described their ethnic identity. Most identified one group only (67%). Using the approach adopted in Aotearoa to deal with multiple ethnicities (Cormack & Robson, 2010), youth reporting Māori identity (indigenous) were classified as Māori, those reporting Pacific Island ethnicity (e.g. Samoan, Tongan) but not Māori were classified as Pacific. Pākehā (white) were youth of European descent who did not identify Māori or Pacific ethnicity. The remaining 11 youth were classified as 'other' due to small numbers.

Parenthood – A dichotomous, yes/no measure at each interview captured biological parenthood status.

Education Factors

On track with education – A dichotomous summary measure was created that was calculated from responses to 3 separate questions capturing current year-level of education, educational credentials achieved, and age. This enabled assessment of whether or not the young person was on track with their education in relation to their age. While most youth (approximately 80%) were not participating in mainstream classrooms during the study, many were participating in other forms of education or training. Youth were coded "yes" if at school or in alternative forms of education that was appropriate to their age.

In mainstream education – A dichotomous yes/no question asked youth whether they were attending mainstream school.

Educational Outcomes – A four-point scale captured whether the young person was enrolled in educational programmes appropriate to their age, whether they had achieved school qualifications appropriate to their age, and whether they achieved qualifications in mainstream educational settings. High scores indicate positive educational outcomes. Time 1 α = .79, Time 2 α = .80, and Time 3: α=.77.

Positive school environment – Assessed youth feelings of safety at school (or last school attended) and the level of engagement felt with education. Questions explored teacher intervention in violent situations, sense of belonging at school and the extent to which youth considered their school to be a good place to be. Youth ranked themselves on a five-point scale where 1 = does not describe my situation at all to 5 = describes my situation a lot. Time 1, α = 0.61; Time 2, α = 0.65; Time 3, α = 0.67.

Education risk – Three questions asked about the frequency with which youth had been stood down (required to not attend school for a period of time), excluded (asked to not attend indefinitely) or expelled from mainstream school in the past year. Questions had a yes/no format and were summed. Time 1, α = 0.68; Time 2, α = 0.65; Time 3, α = 0.65.

In a similar format, youth were asked about their frequency of wagging (truant) and not being able to attend school due to circumstances beyond their control and also whether or not they had been held back a year.

Employment Factors

Employment status – A dichotomous (yes/no) measure of full-time employment in the last year was created from a question that gave three options (employed full-time, employed part-time, unemployed). Analysis of this variable identified that full-time employment showed the largest degree of change over time and therefore a dichotomous measure of full-time vs part-time/unemployed was the most appropriate way of handling this variable, given the focus of the research on processes of change over time.

Employment skills and goals – Two specific sets of questions (nine questions in total) were created in conjunction with professionals who support vulnerable youth into employment. They were tested for acceptability with youth. These built on extant research completed with older cohorts of vulnerable individuals, which identified positive links between employment skills and goals and better employment outcomes (see for example; Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Lifshitz, 2017; Rubenstein, Zhang, Ma, Morrison & Jorgensen 2019). The questions asked youth to rank themselves on a 5-point sale where 1 = *not at all like me*, and 5 = *a lot like me*, so that higher scores indicated greater levels of skills and goals. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were completed on these questions. This confirmed that the nine items could be grouped into two dimensions: one related to goals and the other related to skills. Cronbach alpha were adequate for both dimensions:

i)   **Employment goals:** five questions asked at Time 2 and Time 3 covered aspects such as whether youth had a type of career or job they wanted, and whether they had a career plan. High scores indicate high levels of employment goals. Time 2, α = .86; Time 3, α=.86. Sample items of questions are: "I have a career plan", "I know what sort of job I want to do".

ii) **Employment skills:** four questions asked at Time 2 and Time 3 covered aspects such as knowing how to find work, to compile a C.V. and how to behave in a job interview. High scores indicate high levels of skills. Time 2: α = .71 Time 3: α=.67. Sample items of questions are: "I know how to find a job", "I know how to behave in a job interview", "I know how to put together a C.V.".

Individual Resources

Life satisfaction – The five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale was used (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Higher scores indicate greater levels of satisfaction. Following testing, response options were reduced to a five-point scale. Time 1, α = .82; Time 2, α = .84; and Time 3, α = .83.

Self-esteem – Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-report scale was used at Times 2 and 3. Some items were reverse scored so that high scores indicate high levels of self-esteem. Time 2, α = .85 Time 3, α=.86.

Perseverance – The eight items of the adolescent version of the Grit Scale (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007) assessed levels of perseverance at Times 2 and 3. Some items were reverse scored so that high scores indicate high levels of perseverance. Time 2, α = .66; Time 3, α=.68.

Purposefulness – The 13-item Purpose in Life subscale of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was used at Times 2 and 3 with some items being reverse-scored so that high scores indicate high levels of purposefulness. Time 2: α = .84; Time 3: α=.85.

Practical skills – Based on the Casey Family Program's transition to independent living assessment tool, ten questions at Times 2 and 3 assessed practical, daily life skills required for independent living such as competence in a range of household tasks. Higher scores indicate higher levels of practical skills. Time 2, α = .90; Time 3,α=.88.

Individual Risks

Depression – The12-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale was used (CES-D-12-NLSCY: Poulin, Hand & Boudreau, 2005). Some items were reverse scored so higher scores indicate higher levels of depression. Time 1, α =.78; Time 2, α =.82; Time 3, α =.81.

Delinquency and health risk behaviours – The 4-H Delinquency (e.g. theft, vandalism and aggression) and the 4-H (Health) Risk (use of substances) subscales were used (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). High scores indicate high levels of risk. Time 1, α =.82 and .78; Time 2, α =.83 and .77; Time 3, α =.83 and .72, respectively.

Conduct problems – The Conduct Problems subscale of the SDQ questionnaire was used to measure conduct problems (α = .60; Goodman, 1997, 2001). Some items were reverse scored. Higher scores indicate higher levels of conduct problems. The reliability of the measure was Time 1, α = .60; Time 2, α = .60; Time 3, α = .63.

Peer problems – The SDQ Peer problems scale was used to assess peer problems (α = .61; Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 1998). Some items were reverse scored. Lower scores are indicative of normative peer relationships while higher scores are indicative of peer relationship difficulties. The reliability of the scale in this study was Time 1:, α = .50; Time 2, α = .55; Time 3, α = .55.

Relational Resources

Positive family relationships (reverse scored for family risks) – The Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure, from the Resilience Research Center at Dalhousie University, assessed the nature of the relationship with parental figures and the amount of affection and support received. High scores indicate more positive parent-youth relationships. Time 1, α =.82; Time 2, α = .80; Time 3, α=.80.

Positive peer influence (reverse scored for peer group risk) – An adapted, reverse-scored list of questions from the fourth and fifth cycles of Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth assessed levels of peer engagement in a range of risks behaviours (smoking, drinking and breaking the law). High scores indicate low levels of peer risk-taking. Time 1, α =.86; Time 2, α = .84; Time 3, α=.84.

Access to support – Four questions asked youth at Times 2 and 3 to identify if they had access to adults who could provide them with places of safety, support and advice. These adults could be anyone positive in their personal networks. High scores indicate greater access to support. Time 2, α = .82; Time 3, α=.83.

Contextual Resources

Neighbourhood safety (reverse scored for neighbourhood risks) – Items from the Boston Youth Survey (BYS) were used. Some items were reverse scored so that high scores indicated a safer community. Time 1, α =60; Time 2, α = .62; and Time 3, α = .66.

Service use – Using questions from the Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure, from the Resilience Research Center at Dalhousie University, an index was created that measured levels of life-time service system involvement (Time 1), and service use in in the previous year (Times 2 and 3) for 35 types of services across four service systems. The systems were education (additional to mainstream classes); mental health; youth, child and family; and justice services. Answers were summed.

Quality of service experiences – A composite score assessing service quality was created from youth answers to 13 questions asked at Time 1 relating to two different services. Twelve of these items were adapted from the Youth Services Survey (YSS; Brunk, Koch, & McCall, 2000); a 13th item was added after pilot testing in study sites; α= .91 (service 1); and α= .93 (service 2).

Resilience – The survey included an ecological assessment of the resilience resources available to youth. The Child and Youth Resilience Measure was used for this purpose (α = .91, CYRM-28; Liebenberg, Ungar, Van de Vijver, 2012). The CYRM allows an ecological assessment of the resilience resources available to youth from individual, relational, spiritual/community and social/cultural domains. Reliability for the CYRM in the current study was Time 1, α = .86; Time 2, α = .89; Time 3, α = .89.

ANALYSIS

Survey data

A number of techniques were used to analyse the survey data. T-tests and chi-square tests were used to describe general patterns in the youth data and also to compare with comparison group youth. In the education and employment analyses generalised estimating equation (GEE) (logistic) models using Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2017) were used to identify factors that influence educational pathways and transitions to employment. GEE models can be fitted appropriately to distributions with varying properties (identity, Poisson, binomial) using the *family* specification, with the assumptions of the model mirroring those of linear regression models. A critical feature of GEE models is the ability to account for across-time variation in outcome measures, modelling this as either a linear function, or (using design variates) modelling change from one period to another. Furthermore, these models can be extended to include key covariates, including time-dynamic (repeated) measures. In each model and at all steps of the analyses, dummy variables representing time period and interview site were included.

In the education analysis changes over time on three measures of educational progress were examined by first fitting a series of Generalized Estimating Equation (GEE; Liang & Zeger, 1986) models with random effects and generalised least squares estimation to the data. A separate model was fitted for each (repeated measure) of the three dependent variables (in mainstream education; on track with education, and the educational outcome scale score- see measures). In a second step, a series of bivariate GEE models were fitted, pairing each outcome (in mainstream education; on track and educational outcomes) with each predictor, in order to estimate the (pooled over time) bivariate association between each predictor and outcome. In the final step, a series of multivariate GEE models were fitted, modelling the pooled associations between each educational progress outcome measure and the set of predictors (see Measures). In this procedure, models were refined using forward and backward variable substitution to arrive at a set of stable and parsimonious models, in which all predictors were either marginally ($p < .10$) or significantly ($p < .05$) associated with the outcome measure.

In the employment analysis a repeated measures generalised estimating equation (GEE) model (logistic) was fitted for the dichotomous measure of full-time employment (vs. no employment/part-time employment; T2, T3), over two steps. In order to determine which predictors should be entered into the multivariate model the first step involved estimating bivariate associations between each predictor and the outcome measure. Dummy variables were included to control for time period (T2, T3) and potential variation due to clustering within interview locations (there was no evidence of significant effects due to clustering by interview sites, all p values > .05). To exclude the possibility that the pattern of bivariate associations observed in this first step were due to the effects of correlated predictors the next step involved modelling the fixed and time-dynamic covariate factors (with statistically non-significant predictors removed to reduce error) using forward and backward substitution to arrive at a stable and parsimonious model predicting full-time employment (T2, T3). This model also included the baseline dichotomous measure of employment status, and dummy variables controlling for time period and location of interview.

In addition to GEE modelling, path analysis using SPSS AMOS was used to examine the role that school exclusion played in criminal justice system involvement in the young people's lives and also as part of the exploration of the role that psycho-social service system involvement played in better outcomes. Path analysis takes account of the complex structure of relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables (Byrne, 2010). Confirmatory factor analyses were undertaken on raw items to validate the measurement models used and where the fit statistics were satisfactory scales were used in the modelling. Exploratory factor analysis using oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) were used to determine clustering of theoretical components to enable the creation of each AMOS model. Following this, MANOVA was used to identify differences in the model elements that were attributable to demographic characteristics. In addition to this, MANCOVA was used to help determine the role of consistent service quality in better youth outcomes.

The Qualitative Interviews

A semi-structured interview was used to create a life-story with participants over the three annual interviews. The questions focused on: experiences of service use, family, school, community, their resources and networks of support, relationships, experiences of harm, understanding of health and wellbeing, their views on what did or what could assist them in addressing their challenges and achieving their goals, and, their reflections on their transition experiences. These interviews generated rich accounts allowing a deep understanding about the lived realities of these young people.

Youth were interviewed individually, and they could choose to bring a support person. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and were carried out in a location chosen by the young person. Interviews were audio-recorded and young people could write and draw their answers as well as speak and be audio-recorded.

Interviewers had responsibility for a group of young people and for their PMKs so participants saw the same person each year (wherever possible this was the same person who interviewed them during the survey phase). In the qualitative phase, this created an ongoing narrative with each participant. The young people and their PMKs reported that they felt listened to and that they trusted their interviewer. Many commented on the respect they were shown and appreciated the efforts interviewers went to in setting up interviews and conducting them at suitable times and places.

The interviews generated rich accounts allowing a deep understanding about the life course of these young people. They allowed personal experiences and interpretations of life events to be connected with wider issues (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). For example, the challenges young people talked about in terms of trying to find secure employment reflected the current labour market policies such as zero hours contracts and 90-day trials.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, checked by the interviewer and coded using QSR NVivo. As illustrated below (Figure 1) both horizontal (thematic coding to identify patterns and themes across youth) and vertical coding (coding that allowed the generation of individual case studies for each youth) was undertaken on the qualitative interviews. This allowed for surfacing of patterns across interviews at the same time as the integrity of each young person's personal story was maintained. Coding was carried out by a team. For horizontal coding, first-level themes were generated based on the qualitative schedule where data was sorted into codes based on sensitising concepts drawn from the research questions and the literature. Second-level analysis generated additional themes that either added conceptual depth to the first-level themes or added new conceptual categories. Figure 2 illustrates this process using the example of the employment node. Following completion of horizontal coding, vertical coding within each interview was completed and this was condensed into a series of 107 case studies which could then be drawn on in a range of analytical activities. Rigour and trustworthiness was achieved through a process of individual researchers coding transcripts and then meeting with the larger team to discuss emerging themes. Discrepancies in coding, analysis and interpretation were resolved by discussion and review of transcripts.
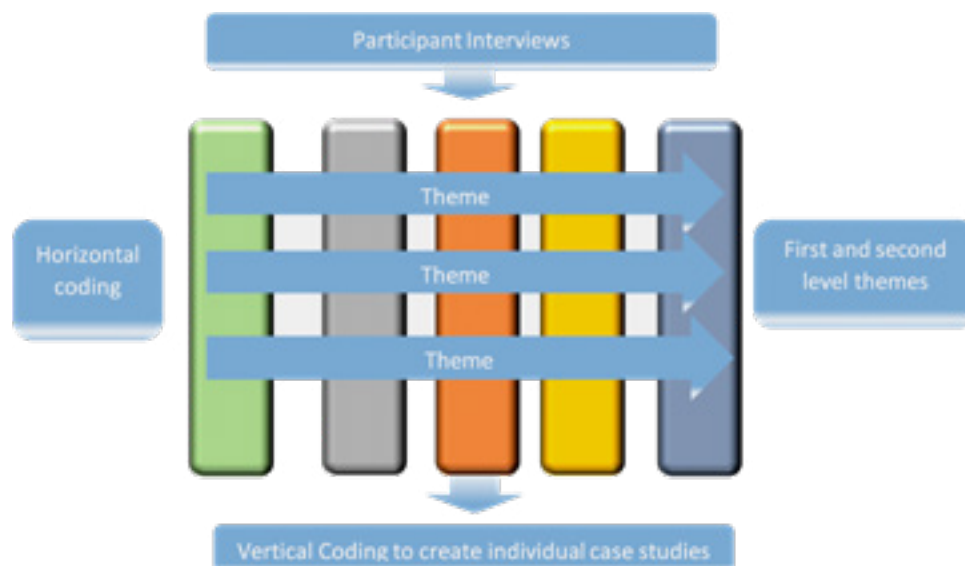

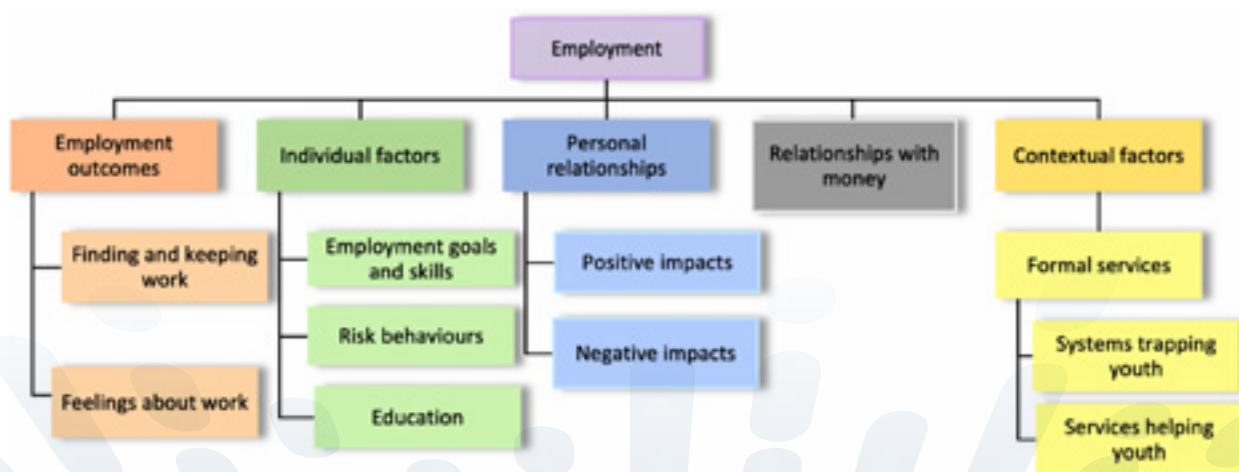**Figure 1.** Illustration of vertical and horizontal coding

Figure 2. Example of horizontal coding structure – the employment node

INTRODUCING THE YOUNG PEOPLE

This section provides a brief overview of the youth who participated in the research. It begins with a section drawn from the qualitative interviews that contextualises the lives of the vulnerable group of youth in relation to the transition process. Attention then turns to responses to survey questions and where relevant compares the vulnerable group to the comparison group. In general terms, the vulnerable group were significantly different on all the measures included in the survey reflecting the challenging lives they lived. At times, these differences were relatively small, at other times they were very large. What this meant was that the comparison group tended to report more moderate stresses and the presence of more protective factors while the vulnerable group were more likely to report higher levels of stress, more disadvantage and fewer protective factors. These patterns suggest a consistent pattern of disadvantage and stress confronted by vulnerable group youth that covered key domains of their lives.

ACCELERATED AND COMPRESSED TRANSITIONS

Increasing autonomy is a feature of adolescence and for this reason one of the key concerns of this research was to understand more about the transition process experienced by vulnerable youth. While learning to manage autonomy is to be encouraged during adolescence, there are limits beyond which it can become problematic for young people. They do not always have the wisdom, experience or resources to make well-founded decisions. Nonetheless, self-reliance was a prominent feature of the lives of the vulnerable group of young people included in this study. Their circumstances while children meant that they had needed to learn to cope on their own from a young age. These types of childhood experiences have been described as accelerated transitions to autonomy and compressed childhoods (Stein et al., 2011; Rogers, 2011). When circumstances mean that children have to grow up quickly and take on adult responsibilities at a young age, their transitions to adulthood are accelerated. For example, from the age of eight Airini (names used throughout this report are pseudonyms) was a full-time sole caregiver for her frail grandfather. In addition to an accelerated transition to autonomy that these caring responsibilities implied, she also had a compressed childhood because these caring duties compromised her capacity to attend school and took from her the possibility of many normative childhood experiences. Coralie shared a similar story of taking on caring responsibilities at a young age:

Coralie's Story
Coralie, as the oldest child, was responsible for ensuring her younger siblings were prepared for school each day. This included waking them, providing breakfast and preparing their lunches. Like Airini, her childhood was full of responsibilities for others, but no-one cared for her and made sure she had the things she needed to thrive. In her second interview, she explained:

> […] it got to the stage of my little brother calling me mum, up until he was about two and a half, three years old. […] I think that finally took a toll on me with the amount of stress, and I finally did get that feeling of having the weight of the world on my shoulders, like I was always having to get up and do things for him, and never being able to just go and hang out with my friends, and stuff like that. So, for me, I feel like for about, from the age of about 10 up until I went to high school, like I missed out on a huge amount of just being. Just being a kid and exploring the world still. And like I did grow up much too fast, of course, being bought up around, you know, alcohol and drugs and people you probably shouldn't be.

The consequences of compressed childhoods and accelerated autonomy are that young people become very skilled at making do, they learn to make the most of scarce resources and managing their challenging circumstances on their own. It is astonishing that Airini only came to the attention of social services because, at the age of 12, her grandfather's health had deteriorated to such an extent that the caring became too physically burdensome for Airini and the health service became involved in planning his care. While the district nurse had been visiting him for a number of years prior to this, she did not draw anyone's attention to the fact that he was living alone with Airini, nor did she raise concerns about the capacity of this child to care for an elderly man. Neither had the school acted upon Airini's constant absences.

Harry became skilled at stealing food from the supermarket to feed his younger siblings and his cousins. Jake similarly learned to steal to supply himself and other children with the clothes they needed. As they became older, many of the young people started selling drugs and breaking into houses to steal high value goods that could be sold. While these coping strategies are anti-social and counter-productive, they need to be understood as the best coping strategies these children could devise given their circumstances (Aaltonen, 2013; Quinn, Poirer & Garfinkel, 2005). Aaltonen (2013, 387) observes:

> …even rule-breaking, which is among those limited options available to them [vulnerable youth], may be intertwined with attempts to cope with, to escape from, or to respond to difficult circumstances.

As seen in Arini's case, there were many missed opportunities for services to become involved at an early stage and positively intervene. Without compassionate and effective intervention, she struggled as best she could to care for herself and her grandfather. Unfortunately these are not unusual situations, and internationally, the capacity to cope of children and youth facing such privations has also been observed elsewhere (Aaltonen, 2013; Baggio et al., 2015). The strong sense of independence developed because of early experiences was protective in that it meant the youth knew how to generate money and find shelter on their own. However, it also created significant challenges for them because these strategies typically comprised pathways into offending and made them vulnerable to exploitation. Thus, when things went wrong their default coping strategies were more likely to intensify the risks they faced than protect them.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

In terms of living arrangements, the vulnerable group reported a diverse range of living arrangements, more so than the comparison group (Fisher's exact test: $p < .001$; $\chi^2(12, n=1186)=267.572$, $p < .001$). Significantly more of these youth lived in non-family/whānau situations than comparison group youth (22.8% vs 1.7%); significantly fewer lived with one or both birth parents (19.4% vs 58.7%); more had lived rough in the last year (22.8% vs 2.7%). Vulnerable group youth were also more likely to be living in over-crowded situations. They came from larger families/whānau ($\chi^2(3, n = 1186) = 59.226$ $p < .001$) and lived in smaller dwellings than comparison group youth (1-2 bedrooms vulnerable group - 12.6% and comparison group - 6.3%).

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL RESOURCES

MOTHER AND FATHER FIGURES

Youth were asked to identify from a list of people (e.g. biological parent, grandparent, foster parent) who best represented a *mother figure* and a *father figure* to them. This was the person who made day-to-day decisions about or with them. They were also asked to rate on a four-point scale the amount of affection they received from these two people, and, on a three-point scale, the closeness of this relationship.

Youth from both groups chose their *biological mother* (72.8% vulnerable group and 89.9% comparison group) and *biological father* (55.8% vulnerable group and 77.6% comparison group) most often as their mother/father figures. However, youth from the comparison group were significantly more likely than youth from the vulnerable group to identify their biological parent as playing each of these roles.

While biological parents were the most commonly identified parent-figures for both vulnerable and comparison groups, almost twice as many youth from the vulnerable group identified a relative (non-parent) as their parent figure as did comparison group youth. Vulnerable group youth also nominated other types of non-familial adults (including social workers) as acting in a parent role in their lives with greater frequency than was the case for comparison group youth (vulnerable group mother figure - 5.1%, father figure - 5.1%; comparison group mother figure - 0.2%, father figure - 0.5%). There were also significant differences in the amount of affection vulnerable and comparison group youth received from mother and father figures such that comparison group reported significantly more affection than vulnerable group youth. A similar pattern applied to the measure of closeness to parent figures.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND PARENTHOOD

Alongside the patterns noted above, of less affection and less closeness to the key caregiving figures in the lives of vulnerable group youth, was increased emotional attachment elsewhere. Vulnerable group youth reported higher rates of intimate relationships than comparison group youth (vulnerable group - 47.2% and comparison group - 27.3%) and while no youth in the comparison group reported being parents at the first interview, when youth were aged between 12 and 17 years, 2.2 % of the vulnerable group had become parents prior to this first interview.

EDUCATION

Patterns of engagement with and experiences of, education were markedly different for the two groups of youth. For instance, comparison group youth were more likely to be enrolled in some form of education (96% vs 79%; χ^2(1, n = 1186) = 73.297, $p < .001$) and to have attended fewer schools (t(962.147) = -12.665, $p < .001$; vulnerable group: M =5.141±2.888; comparison group: M =3.394±1.703). Further, of those enrolled in educational programmes, comparison group youth were more likely to be attending a mainstream school (vulnerable group 22%; comparison group 99.5%). A majority of vulnerable group youth (67.12%) had stopped attending school prior to year 11 (5th form).

The comparison group (86.5%) were more likely than the vulnerable group (50.9%) to be enrolled in school-based qualifications such as NCEA (χ^2(2, n = 858 = 129.016, $p < .001$[1]). On the other hand, vulnerable group youth were more likely to be enrolled in other types of courses such as national certificates and qualifications provided by non-school based educational providers[2] (vulnerable group - 15.3%; comparison group - 1.5%).

Most comparison group youth (83.4%) who were over 16 years of age had achieved 8 literacy and 8 numeracy credits at Level 1 of NCEA, the comparison statistic for the vulnerable group was just over one-third (35.7%; χ^2(3, n = 501) = 120.890, $p < .001$).

Given the profile above, and the issues vulnerable youth confronted in staying engaged in education, it is particularly notable that 82% hoped to achieve educational credentials. Their aspirations, however, were different to comparison group youth. Vulnerable group youth were more likely to hope to achieve NCEA Level 1 or 2 (vulnerable group - 16.2% and comparison group - 5.7%) and to hope to achieve a certificate or a trade qualification (vulnerable group - 39.5% and comparison group - 20.1%). In terms of post-secondary credentials vulnerable group youth were more likely to aspire to achieve certificates and diplomas or technical qualifications, while comparison group youth were more likely to hope to finish NCEA Level 3 or scholarship (comparison group - 17.7% and vulnerable group - 10.8%) and obtain a university degree (comparison group - 45.0% and vulnerable group - 15.7%).

Youth from the comparison group were also more likely to report that they felt they belonged at school (comparison group - 74.5% and vulnerable group - 39%) and to place a higher importance on education (comparison group - 89.2%, vulnerable group - 60.9%; χ^2(1, n = 805) = 10.18, p = .001). Alongside this, as can be seen from Table 2, vulnerable group youth reported higher rates of harsher penalties at school than did the comparison group (Excluded from school in the last year: vulnerable group: m=1.8, sd=1.2; comparison group: m=.17, sd=0.5; t(794.8) = 30.9, p = .000, two tailed; η^2= .4). Table 2 also highlights the greater complexity of educational needs vulnerable group youth brought to school as significantly more reported being held back at school.

Table 2. Indicators of exclusion and challenges at school

	Vulnerable Group %	Comparison Group %	χ^2
Stood down	68	10	410.53*
Suspended	65	5.7	454.66*
Expelled	50	1.3	368.64*
Held back	16	3	57.09*

* p = <.000

The differences in the rates at which youth from the two groups removed themselves from school were also significant. Most (60%) of the youth from the comparison group reported not wagging at all, or wagging only once, in the last year. Just over half (54.8%) of vulnerable group youth reported wagging a few times a week or every day in the last year. In addition to this, vulnerable group youth reported that they had been unable to attend school due to factors beyond their control at a much greater rate than comparison group youth (vulnerable group 41%; comparison group 17.9%).

In order to understand aspirations about the future, youth were asked to choose as many items as were relevant to them from a list of options about what they would hope to be doing when they left school, or in the near future. As with other dimensions of this study, there were notable differences between vulnerable group and comparison group youth. For instance, more comparison group youth hoped to hope do training or further education, (comparison group - 27% and vulnerable group - 13.5%), while more of the vulnerable group hoped to look for a job or start working (vulnerable group - 21.9% and comparison group - 11.3%), and more vulnerable group youth hoped to be balancing working and training (vulnerable group - 14% and comparison group - 6.7%).

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[1] These figures relate only to those youth from the vulnerable group and the comparison group who were older than 15 years and thus eligible to be enrolled for NCEA or related qualifications.

[2] For example, SPEC, AZDAN, Gateway and Land-based Training.

RISKS AND RESILIENCE

The research gathered data on individual risk factors and resilience of youth in both the vulnerable and comparison groups. The two groups (see Table 3) differed significantly on all of these measures. Vulnerable group youth reported significantly more risk and had fewer personal and ecological resources (resilience) to call upon to address this risk. Overall then, they experienced more disadvantage than their comparison group peers at the point of entry into the study.

Table 3. Comparisons of vulnerable group and comparison group on measures of individual risks and CYRM resilience

Measure	Vulnerable group n=593	Comparison group n=593	t	p
Individual Risks - Mean (SD)				
SDQ peer problems	2.49 (1.71)	1.53 (1.45)	-11.21	<.0001
SDQ conduct problems	4.54 (2.48)	2.08 (1.94)	-20.80	<.0001
4H delinquency	10.28 (7.18)	2.50 (3.91)	-25.61	<.0001
CESD-NYLSCY depression	9.94 (6.03)	6.84 (5.04)	-10.32	<.0001
Resilience - Mean (SD)				
CYRM resilience	103.44 (16.01)	110.72 (14.69)	8.74	<.0001

SERVICE EXPERIENCES

The survey gathered two sets of information relating to service experiences: service volume and the quality of the service experience.

SERVICE VOLUME

Service volume was measured by a composite score that counted the number of services youth had contact with over their lifetime up to the point of the first interview. The services were divided into five service categories: education, child and youth, youth justice, mental health and physical health. As would be expected, given the selection criteria (see Methodology) youth from the vulnerable group (M = 14.30, SD = 6.18) reported significantly more lifetime use of each of five service categories than was the case for comparison group youth (M = 5.71, SD = 3.09; t(871.569) = 30.30, p < .001) and the magnitude of this difference was large (mean difference =8.59, 95% CI: 8.04-9.15, η^2 = .513). The more vulnerable the youth were the greater was the volume of service volume they received across their life course.

THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICE EXPERIENCE

As noted in the Introduction, a key issue in terms of service involvement is the quality of services received. Accordingly, quality of service experience was assessed by 13 questions that were ranked on a 5 point scale (see Measures) that assessed different aspects of service quality. Taken together, the questions gave an overall rating of the quality of the service experience, with a focus on aspects that encouraged active involvement of youth and their families/whānau and that emphasised respect for youth and responsiveness to the realities of their lives. The following discussion considers vulnerable group youth responses to the service quality questions in relation to the four service systems (juvenile justice, education, child welfare, mental health) and the type of organisation (statutory or NGO). Because the comparison group, by definition, had lower or negligible service use, they are not included in this discussion.

Overall the mean service quality scores for all service systems and both service types (statutory or NGO) were above the theoretical mean of 5 out of 10 (M=7.45, SD=1.53). Looking at the different service systems, child welfare providers received the lowest overall quality scores (M=6.46, SD=1.86) while alternative education providers received the highest scores (M=7.95, SD=1.47).

There were also significant differences in the quality of the service experience according to service system (F(3, 266.34) = 20.56, p < .001). The size of this difference (η^2 = 0.11) was quite large. In particular child welfare (M = 6.45, SD = 1.86) and juvenile justice (M = 6.95, SD = 1.53) means were significantly lower than those for education (M = 7.95, SD = 1.45) and mental health (M = 7.76, SD = 1.48). Looking at service quality by type of service provider, youth were more likely to report a positive service experience from an NGO provider (M = 7.95, SD = 1.60) than with statutory providers (M = 6.84, SD = 1.70, t(518) = 6.88, p <.001). The magnitude of this difference was large (η^2 = .08).

These then were the characteristics of the young people who participated in the research. They lived demanding and challenging lives, and their needs were not always well met by the people responsible for their care. Systems and services became involved in their lives, some of which were part of a normative childhood and adolescence (such as going to school, or having a job) while others sought to address some of the issues and challenges the young people faced. The remainder of this report considers young people's experiences with education and trying to find work – some of the normative experiences of growing up – as well as their experiences of psycho-social, emotional and other formal interventions.

EDUCATION

THE LITERATURE

It is often argued that education has the potential to compensate for disadvantages young people confront elsewhere in their lives (Frønes, 2010; O'Neill Dillon, Liem & Gore, 2003). Indeed, of all the services modern societies provide, if for no other reason than its universality, education is the single most potent potential equaliser of disadvantages and challenges children confront. It is also the institution most often and consistently encountered during childhood and adolescence and its potential to have a positive impact is accordingly large and broad-based. Further, successfully completing school is critical to successful transitions to adulthood (Frønes, 2010; O'Neill et al., 2003).

Paradoxically, given its importance to the life chances of vulnerable youth, much of the research into educational outcomes has been conducted in schools, yet vulnerable youth are least likely to be consistently attending school and therefore their experiences are often not visible in the research account (Sodha & Guglielmi, 2009; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013). For these reasons, education was a key focus in this research. At the very least in commencing the research we had anticipated that schools would not undermine the capacity of the vulnerable youth to reach normative milestones and be able to see pathways to achieving their potential. Indeed, we had expected to gather rich examples of schools working creatively to support these vulnerable young people to stay engaged in education through their adolescence thus equipping them with some resources to scaffold their transitions into the workforce.

However, consistent with international observations of the experiences of vulnerable youth, the young people in the current study often found school a hostile and unwelcoming place. While, as noted above, success at school has the potential to help to redress wider patterns of disadvantage, the international evidence is that youth who come to school with disadvantages are more likely to prematurely disengage than their more advantaged peers. In this process they lose access to resources that would equip them for successful adult lives (Howieson & Iannelli, 2009; Lucas, 2001). What these commentators argue is that accumulating educational credentials is not primarily shaped by academic ability, but rather by institutional practices that favour more privileged students (Lucas, 2001; Lumby, 2012). School practices and the wider social disadvantages and risks youth face in their families and neighbourhoods contribute more to these differential outcomes than the academic ability of individual students (Howieson & Iannelli, 2009). This means that, in the end, the education system replicates structural and other inequalities rather than moderating or removing them (Becker & Tuppat, 2013).

Given the above, it is surprising that the bulk of research into factors associated with premature disengagement from school highlights the role played by individual-level variables. The impact of psychosocial and behavioural factors, such as conduct and attention disorders along with mental health issues, on reduced rates of high school graduation has been very well documented (Breslau, Miller, Chung & Schweitzer, 2011; Kessler, Foster, Saunders & Stang, 1995). Schools often struggle to positively manage challenging behaviours and expulsion becomes the favoured response (Gibb, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2010; Hammen, Brennan, Keenan-Miller & Herr, 2008; Parffrey, 1994). Indeed, so well recognised is this pattern of school responses to challenging behaviours by vulnerable youth that it has been labelled the school-to-prison-pipeline (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007; Wald & Losen, 2003). This is a process by which the selective application of harsh punishments by schools to certain groups of youth (such as those from minority ethnic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds and in the child welfare system) propels them out of school and into the justice system (Sodha & Guglielmi, 2009). In this way, schools play a central role in reinforcing institutional racism and discrimination towards youth from minority groups as well as those exposed to other disadvantages, who come from poor families and marginalised communities. They do not act as equalisers at all (Christle et al., 2007).

While, as already noted, considerable research attention has been given to the impact individual-level factors have upon students' capacities to complete their schooling, much less has attention has been paid to other factors. What work there is suggests that positive peers and friends can play a protective role for vulnerable youth, assisting with school adjustment and educational outcomes (You, 2011). On the other side of the coin, troubled family relationships exacerbate the challenges these youth confront in staying at school. In particular, difficulties in relationships with parents reduce the chances that students will complete high school (O'Neill Dillon et al., 2003). Furthermore, the emergence of problem behaviours associated with early school exit are linked to hostile, aggressive and controlling parenting, while positive parent-child relationships are protective for youth across all domains of their lives, including education (Berzin, 2010; Elliot & Morse, 1989, Metzler et al., 2017; O'Neill Dillon et al., 2003).

There is a small, but growing literature on school environments that links differences in student achievement to the quality of the environments created by school staff, again implicating the behaviours of school personnel in poorer outcomes for vulnerable youth (Donovan & Jessor, 1985; Metzler et al. 2017; Williams et al. 2008). Croninger and Lees' (2001) work demonstrated that positive interactions with school staff played a critical role in enabling adolescents to remain at school when they otherwise might disengage. The importance of this body of work is that it speaks to the role positive practices by school staff can play in offsetting the impact that challenging relationships and risks outside of school have upon student capacity to complete education (Christle et al., 2007). Key observations made in this body of work include the powerful positive impact that respectful practices by teachers towards students have upon reductions in levels of challenging student behaviour and also on school graduation rates. (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Simple strategies such as teachers treating students with respect and creating classroom environments in which students can exercise personal agency lead to increased levels of prosociality in student behaviour (Martin, 2006). The evidence here is that rather than exceptional or grand actions, it is the positive daily relational practices of schools that impact most upon the capacity of students facing challenges to stay at school (Christle et al., 2007). Conversely, schools that marginalise, shame, humiliate, punish and exclude students generate feelings of anger and resentment that follow youth into adulthood, creating issues for them and society around the inability to adapt well to work environments and function as good citizens (Martin, 2006).

The relationships around young people are dynamic and interconnected and have important cumulative impacts upon their capacity to complete schooling. Challenges in one relational domain can be offset by positive relationships in another domain. For instance, positive family and peer relationships that support youth to continue attending school can bolster young people who find school relationships challenging (DeLuca, Godden, Hutchinson & Versnel, 2015). Alternatively, challenges in one domain can compound relationship challenges in other domains, making it harder to sustain educational progress. For instance, troubled relationships at home can propel young people into antisocial peer groups, and the resulting challenging behaviours can then spill over into school resulting in expulsion (Donovan & Jessor, 1985). Positive relationships in different domains can also reinforce each other, and so positive peer and teacher relations can augment and bolster each other leading to greater than anticipated levels of school engagement (Vollet, Kindermann & Skinner, 2017).

THE DATA

Given that the young people in the current study were aged between 12 and 17 at entry to the study and by study-end they were aged between 18 and 24, we expected to see education, such a powerful resource, compensating for other disadvantages and playing a role in fostering a hopeful orientation to the future. At the very least, we had anticipated that the youth would be accumulating some of the educational credentials that would support pathways into employment. The part of their lives they shared with us, therefore, should have prominently featured engagement in school, completion of qualifications, and transitions into and out of post-secondary education as well as the use of education to leverage successful workforce transitions.

However, for these youth education was not straightforward. Almost all of them (83%) were under the mandated leaving age at the first interview; yet only 22% were still regularly participating in mainstream classrooms. Despite this high level of exclusion from mainstream, compulsory education, just over two thirds (65.4%) were still on track with their education (that is; achieving and/or enrolled in programmes appropriate to their age), suggesting considerable motivation and the potential for positive outcomes to still be achieved. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. As can be seen in Table 4, by the third survey, the percentage of youth still on track with their education had dropped to 52%, a significant 13% drop on their Time 1 status. Accompanying this loss of progress was a related significant decrease in overall educational outcomes for these youth. Yet, given their age, it would have been reasonable to expect that scores on the educational outcome measure would have increased across the three survey points, representing the steady accumulation of educational credentials that is part of a normative adolescence.

Table 4. Percentages and mean (SD) scores for education measures, Time 1 to Time 3 (GEE modelling).

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
% in mainstream education	22.1[a]	23.1[a]	18.2[b]
% on track	65.4[a]	65.5[a]	51.8[b]
Mean (SD) Educational Outcomes scale score	1.59[a]	1.28[b]	0.91[c]
	(1.40)	(1.36)	(1.21)

Note: Differing superscripts indicate statistically significant ($p<.05$) differences.

Table 5. Multivariate associations between education measures and predictors, pooled across time periods (GEE modelling used, see Methods).

Predictor	In mainstream education		On track		Educational Outcomes scale score	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Baseline factors						
Gender	1.04*	.41	.21	.15	.30***	.08
Age	-.58**	.17	- -	- -	-.15***	.03
Māori ethnicity	-.96*	.40	-.06	.14	-.17*	.08
Educational factors						
Positive school environment	.23***	.05	.02	.02	.04***	.01
Additional educational services	- -	- -	.10***	.02	.01	.01
Relational resources						
Positive peer influence	.24***	.05	.02	.02	.04***	.01
Positive relationship with parent	- -	- -	.02	.02	- -	- -
Risks						
Education risk	-.80***	.16	-.38***	.07	-.20***	.03
CESD depression	.05*	.02	- -	- -	- -	- -
Externalising risk	-.01	.02	-.02*	.01	-.00	.00
Service engagement						
Mental health service use	.08*	.04	.01	.02	.02*	.01
Justice services	-.13**	.04	-.00	.01	-.01	.01
Youth, child and family services	.08	.04	- -	- -	.01	.01

*p<0.5; **p<.01

Examining these patterns in more detail, Māori youth, older youth and male youth reported even sharper rates of deterioration in educational outcomes over time than the overall cohort. It was also notable that none of the interventions from services across the full service spectrum (welfare, education, justice and mental health) had any appreciable impact on educational outcomes for the cohort. Further, most importantly, the use of harsh disciplinary practices by schools (represented in Table 5 by the 'education risk' variable) were the strongest predictors of poor educational outcomes for this group of vulnerable youth.

Indeed, there was a direct and significant link between harsh disciplinary practices by schools and later criminal justice system involvement (Figure 3). Exclusion from school also contributed to increased levels of high-risk behaviours such as those measured by the 4H-Delinquency scale. These patterns indicate a concerning interaction between student behavioural issues and school responses. It appears that rather than supporting positive change, schools have pushed these youth out of mainstream classrooms, leading to increased levels of risk behaviours that ultimately led to prison (as indicated by the criminal justice involvement outcome measure in Figure 3).

On the other hand, having a positive peer group (that is a peer group predominantly involved in prosocial activities) and experiencing a sense of belonging and safety at school predicted better educational outcomes and an increased likelihood that youth would remain in mainstream education (Table 5). Thus, even within this group of vulnerable youth, for whom achieving within a mainstream school context was a serious challenge, key factors facilitating their capacity to remain at school were positive relationships with teachers and peers.

Over the three survey points then, this very vulnerable cohort of youth found themselves slipping progressively behind in their education with all the concomitant risks this carried for their long-term wellbeing, ability to feel a sense of belonging, to establish themselves in independent lives as adults and also for their capacity to contribute to their communities. No interventions or actions by the phalanx of professionals that were involved in their lives, much less any positive intervention by schools made a substantive difference to this. Other observers have also pointed to the way in which educational pathways become blocked rather than opened for vulnerable youth locking them into long-term pathways characterised by progressively more entrenched disadvantage (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007).

The potential of education to open up pathways to better opportunities can only be realised if mainstream educational institutions are willing to effectively support these youth. This requires the recognition that their challenging behaviours may, at least in part, be caused by the feelings of exclusion and difference that school engenders, as responses to excluding behaviours of school personnel and also by factors in their home lives that make functioning in a school environment a challenge.

While, some youth, as seen below, did report that schools supported them, for most, school was not a safe, supportive, welcoming place at all and many (33%, *n*= 193) had stopped regularly attending school by year 9 (13 years of age, the first year of high school). With that, the chances of accumulating normative qualifications began to slip away.
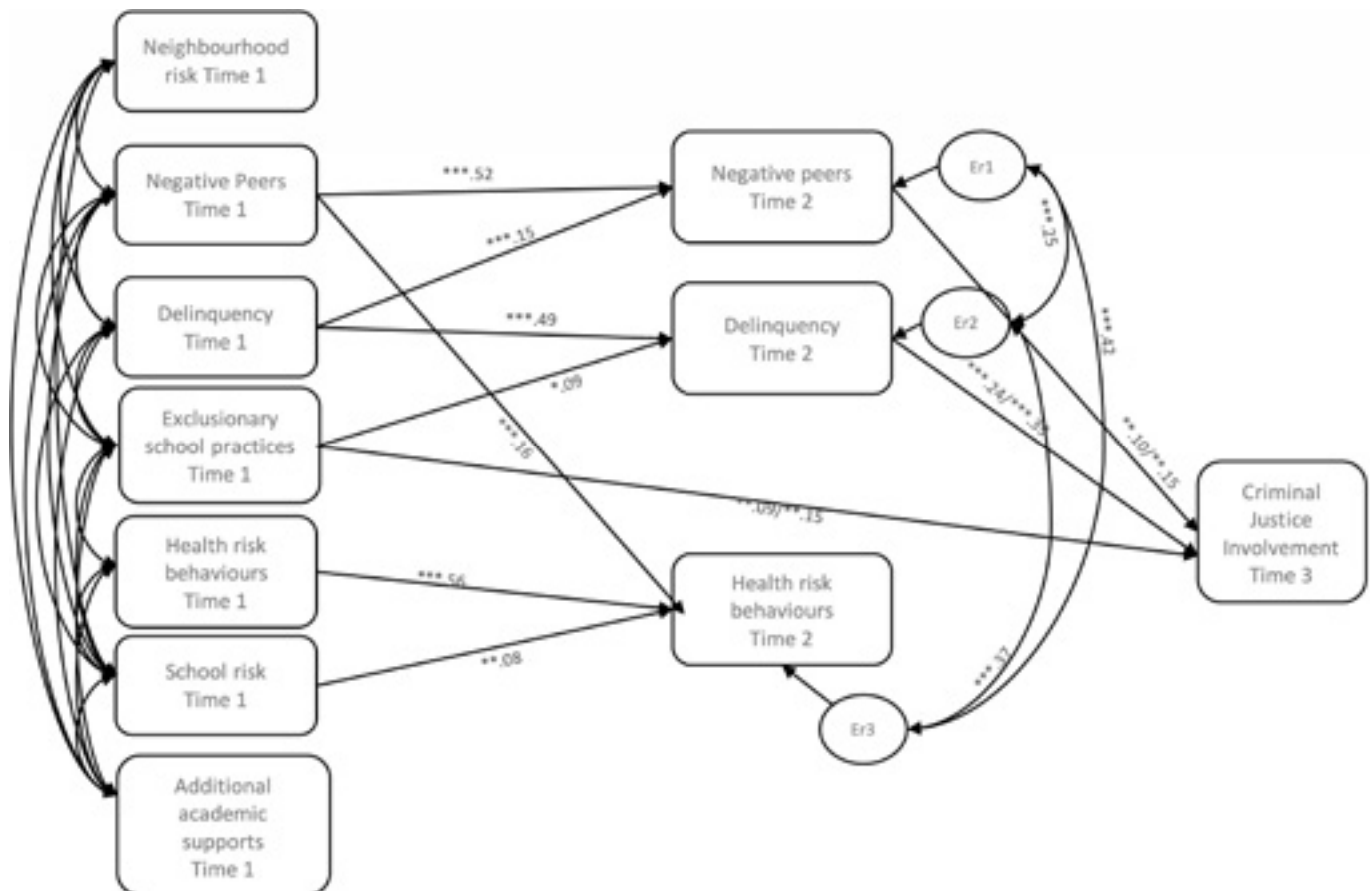
Figure 3. Path Analysis of relationships between individual, contextual and school risks and Criminal Justice System Involvement (male/female)

Mainstream school, then, was complicated for these young people. The qualitative data provided an opportunity to explore youth experiences of schooling in detail. A minority of youth reported it as a safe haven, an escape from challenges confronted at home. These youth spoke of supportive school staff who seemed to understand the challenges they faced and the significant achievement that making it to school each day represented. For these young people, school was a safe place and held longer-term potential of a way out of their challenging circumstances. Several quotations are included below that illustrate the diverse ways in which these youth experienced positive interactions with school staff. While these quotations reflect the experiences of a minority of youth in the study, they do clearly demonstrate the diverse and varied ways in which school professionals can work alongside vulnerable youth to create a safe space for them within the school community.

As such, they are important reminders of the simple, kind and responsive orientations to vulnerable students it is possible for school professionals to adopt that then make it possible for youth to participate in mainstream education:

At the end of the day you've got to have someone there, someone outside of your family; when there is all that shit going on in your family. School should be the one place where you can go to and just be yourself, doesn't change who you are, but it's a place you can go.

I got on really, really well with my Deans and the counsellor; they were kind of like stand in parent figures. They knew what was going on for me. They looked out for me if I was sick, lent me money for the doctors, they were really, really good. I wouldn't have made it through school without that help and knowing they were watching over me.

She was a real good teacher. She came to my (family member's) funeral. She'd stay with you until you understand what you're doing. Believe that you could be that person (i.e., a student).

My science teacher understood the troubles I was going through. She never judged me for it all; I just knew that she knew. I was glad for it. She made sure I was alright.

The psychologist was a big support for me at college. He could read me like a book. If he seen I was having a bad day he would come and get me out of class, get the pressure off.

Every time I was bad he [counsellor] used to just take me into his office, let me sit on his computer, give me some food. Even when I got kicked out of class, he was kind.

I was living with my counsellor. I couldn't have finished school otherwise. I still keep in contact with her; she still makes the time for me. It is incredible.

I have utmost respect for that man (teacher). He understood, like he'd talk to ya, like a person; you would tell him what's happening. He treated me like a human being which was hard to come-by back then. He would keep his word, and if he couldn't do something he would tell me straight up.

These young people tantalisingly reference the critical resilience resources located within schools that they can draw upon to carve out new pathways to secure, prosocial futures. Indeed, despite experiencing significantly more exclusion at school than their peers in the comparison group a majority (61%, *n* = 361) placed a high value on education. Yet, for most of the vulnerable group, school did not function in a supportive, compensatory way. Indeed, the majority of youth reported that they felt alienated from mainstream school; only 16% (*n* = 95) reported that they felt they belonged. In general then, school experiences seemed to replicate the hostility and danger confronted at home and in their neighbourhoods. In doing this, it amplified the negative narratives that surrounded these young people and which had come to define them. School was not a welcoming nor safe place for most. Youth reported victimisation from staff and other students, as well as negative labelling, and a sense of exclusion. These experiences are captured below:

Schools were real hard to be honest. I was always bullied. I used to have girls rip my clothes, pull my hair. Coz we were poor, I never had my own shoes; I went to school in the same clothes that I had worn for the past couple of days . . . I was different, everyone laughed at me.

A place where I belonged (school)? No, not really. I don't think I belonged. I didn't feel like I fitted in.

Teachers had favourites, I wasn't one of them, coz I'm not on the bright side so I was teased or ignored. So I got meself pinned as the class clown. Even when I tried to do the work, teachers would just not even bother with me so I was like, 'Fuck it, whatever'.

While as noted above, a minority of the young people reported that school could be a refuge for them from the stresses and challenges at home, most talked of school as a hostile and unwelcoming place:

You feel different, when you're at school you see everyone else's mums, dads, picking them up and you wish you were going with them.

Probably because of troubles I have at home, I'd carry that and I'd take it to school. But I couldn't leave what I have at home, at home. You're supposed to leave it . . . but really, how do you do that?

I was going through a very hard time of being molested, so going to school was quite hard and actually keeping my emotions and stuff under control, people were bullying me and it wasn't working. I'd be that one that would lose it, throw chairs, shout and scream and hit out at people.

Couldn't hold that feeling in any more so decided to let it all out (anger).

They thought I was just a little brat, and I didn't care about school. I did, it's just the problems that were going on in my life; my dad was going through the courts, which was another load on my shoulders, cops would come to the school for me, it all spills over, hard to keep it in.

High school didn't want me. I had a bad record at intermediate and that followed me to high school. This teacher was always on my back; he finally caught me doing something stupid and finally got rid of me. He made me look that bad that I couldn't go to any other school.

Everyone hated me for who I was. I was never encouraged; all the good things that I did do in school, no one praised me. Only ever criticised for what I did wrong. So I would be like 'Oh well, fuck you then'.

I just hated it. I was embarrassed coz I've got two learning disorders. They said they would get me special help. It never happened; nothing happened about it. I felt very unsuccessful, embarrassed, frustrated. Then when it gets too much I get blamed. So I just constantly kept wagging and fighting.

At the start (primary) I thought school was where I belong, but then I started thinking that school wasn't for me . . . they didn't understand my background and that. I'd had a teacher, honestly, punch my face. I was only 11 years old, and then after that I didn't really trust schools.

It was probably the funnest time in my life (primary school). Two months at college I got kicked out. My family was going through so much at that time. My dad just got out of jail and he was coming round our house, beating my mum up. Too hard to keep it up, had to give it away (school).

Everything fades and fades. The schooling fades, the support network fades. You think it's gonna be easier, when you get out from school. But your friends fade, family fades and then you just feel depressed.

I used to wake up and go floating, I dunno, strange-as feelings hard to describe, like I had disappeared or something, floated away during the night, the end of the chapter . . . it just all petered out after that . . . I was on my own. Downward spiral, drift away.

I was in so much trouble. I was like why do I bother going? Just let it go, be free. It's not for me (school). They look at you differently . . . It got worse after I left every school, I got worse after I got kicked out, just emptiness … then you think 'be that person they think you are, be the baddest, hardest-out person there is. Be that'.

DISCUSSION

It might be argued that through their own behaviours, these young people created the circumstances under which they came to experience school as an alienating place. That is, that schools merely reacted to their behaviours. However, the literature is clear that when schools create positive and enabling climates, school tensions reduce overall and rates of student misbehaviour decrease. Indeed, some of the young people interviewed explained that when school staff created a safe environment, they could then participate in school. However, only a minority of young people in the current study experienced school in this way. Others have also noted that it is within the power of individual schools to either heighten or diminish the impact the risks students face outside of school have on their capacity to engage with education. They do this through the social climates they create and the behavioural policies and practices they adopt (Agnew, 1992; Cohen, 1955; Frønes, 2010; Howieson & Iannelli, 2008; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne & Gottfredson, 2005; Hirschi, 1969; McCrystal, Percy & Higgins, 2007; Payne, 2009). In this way, the social organisation of schools has a major impact on children's psycho-social wellbeing and long term life chances. Through their policies and their daily practices, schools can provoke defiance and resistance in youth, or they can create enabling and encouraging environments that enable vulnerable students to participate (Munford & Sanders, 2017b).

These ideas are not new. Indeed, as far back as 1955, Cohen argued that when students perceived schools as having unjust expectations of them or behaving in unfair ways, they were more likely to respond with defiance. A decade later, Hirschi (1969) suggested that when schools adopted practices that fostered prosocial behaviour by forming meaningful attachments, disruptive behaviours subsided. So schools can and do make choices about the type of climate they create, and this has a direct impact on young people's behaviour and from there upon the types of outcomes youth are able to experience. In other words, the adults responsible for running schools bear some responsibility as professionals to deliver a curriculum and create a sense of safety and belonging in ways that are inclusive of all youth.

The first set of quotations (above) illustrated how school could be a safe and welcoming place that made it possible for the young people to continue to attend and progress their education. Indeed, when school staff knew about the challenges the young people faced at home and in their neighbourhoods, and took account of this in their interactions, young people said they found it easier to stay at school. The survey data reinforced the benefits these youth gained from being supported by school professionals to stay at mainstream school; their chances of securing high school credentials vastly improved.

These then became key resources that might help them create pathways into employment and to secure futures for themselves.

School, then, was hostile and dangerous and reinforced exclusion for most of the young people in the research. When staff knew about the challenges but did not take account of them, or when youth experienced school as unfair and alienating, school became an intolerable place. Their responses to this sense of not fitting in were focused on acting decisively to protect themselves and of solving their own problems in own their ways. When excluded, the data points to a clear pathway into the criminal justice system (see Figure 3). In this way, the survey data confirmed what young people said in their qualitative interviews. Namely, that school practices such as exclusion, rather than their individual risk behaviours, were the key drivers of criminal justice system involvement. In this way, schools directly exacerbated youth circumstances, contributing to poorer outcomes in the process.

The school climate literature is clear, schools have numerous options for positively responding to challenging behaviour by students that enable them to continue attending while at the same time ensuring there is a safe environment for other students. However, the literature and the data from the current study points to systematic bias operating in schools whereby the most vulnerable students are punished more harshly than others. The consequences of this for both the young people and for society can be clearly seen in the analysis (see Figure 3) which highlighted that exclusion from school both boosted levels of delinquency and led to higher rates of criminal justice system involvement. In this sense, everyone loses from the inability of schools to respond constructively to the challenges vulnerable youth present.

Ti Riele (2006) has noted the individualising focus of much discourse around vulnerable and educationally disengaged youth. She draws attention to the way that these discourses centre attention on what is wrong with youth who do not fit in, rather than what may be wrong with schooling. The argument here is that marginalisation is at least as much a product of wider social structures and school practices as it is of the actions taken by individual youth. In order to meaningfully address marginalisation, action needs to occur at the system and school levels at least as much as it does in the individual domain (Sanders, Liebenberg & Munford, 2018; Sanders, Munford & Boden, 2018). This implicates all the professionals involved in the lives of vulnerable youth. There is evidence that when professionals work together across service systems, the life chances for these youth improve.

For instance, in her longitudinal study of young people in foster care Fernandez (2008) reported that placement stability was a major contributor to better educational outcomes; reinforcing findings about school climate noted above, she also found that stability and predictability at school was linked to enhanced wellbeing for foster-care youth. Again, this highlights the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the different relational domains in young people's lives. It is incumbent upon professionals to find ways to positively support youth to remain at school, to return to school, and of making the school environment positive and welcoming.

Of course, schools cannot do this alone and require the constructive support of other professionals if they are to be successful at retaining vulnerable students, and as seen in the data, peers are also potentially a valuable resource that can augment this work. These patterns suggest a need for pan-system responses, whereby schools reduce use of expulsions, create a positive school climate and encourage high levels of positive peer support while other professionals and key adults, such as foster parents, support schools to retain challenging students. This type of approach would create the circumstances under which vulnerable youth come to experience school as a game changer, an equaliser of the challenges and disadvantages they bring with them to school that enables them to continue with their education (Berzin, 2010).

Given that the successful completion of schooling is a key developmental task during adolescence, there is a strong argument that enabling vulnerable students to make educational progress should be a core responsibility for all professionals involved in their lives. Assisting youth facing such challenges to complete their studies needs to become a core accountability for all professionals so involved. Vulnerable youth do well when this need to complete schooling is taken seriously by educators and other professionals. It is therefore of great concern that the bulk of the research evidence is that youth with involvement in multiple services do more poorly than their peers, suggesting service involvement is a risk factor not a benefit and this issue is taken up in more detail below (see Services).

EMPLOYMENT

THE LITERATURE

When education and family have failed young people, employment becomes a critical, and possibly the last, opportunity for youth to create a self-sustaining, prosocial adult life (Frøyland, 2018). On their own, employers are not equipped to offer realistic opportunities to these young people that will make a meaningful difference to their employment outcomes, and vulnerable youth are unlikely to be able to consistently find their own way to secure employment. The disadvantages these youth have accumulated through their childhoods mean they bring with them quite significant needs in areas such as knowing how to successfully integrate into mainstream workplaces. They are unlikely to have been exposed to the educational and developmental opportunities that equip them to make this transition easily (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; EGRIS, 2001). This means that service providers and social and economic policies have a critical role to play in supporting and facilitating pathways into mainstream employment.

Speaking on the Australian context, but with an international lens, Bessant (2018) has suggested that in advanced economies, education does not consistently represent a reliable pathway into the workforce for all youth. She observes that, with the exception of the period between the 1940s and 1980s, the employment prospects of youth have always been precarious and that education has only served as a viable pathway for a small, privileged subsection of the youth population. However, despite this, she observes that the discourse around the pathways for youth to employment remains heavily focused on the education-employment nexus. The consequence of this is that individualised explanations for failing to find work dominate. When vulnerable youth struggle to remain within mainstream schools, their failure to obtain the credentials that open doors into the world of work are seen as their fault (Evans, 2007). Less account is taken of the ways in which wider risks and disadvantages that youth face outside of school, which follow them into their classes and the responses schools then make when they struggle, impact upon their capacity to secure qualifications and then to find work (Howeison & Ianelli, 2008).

Indeed, the bulk of the literature concerning poor youth employment outcomes addresses individual-level factors. For instance, vulnerable youth have been found to face disadvantages in finding work because protective positive personal traits such as high self-esteem, determination and a positive outlook on life are undermined by exposure to adversity during childhood (Bynner & Schoon, 2003; Metzler, et al., 2017). But even when vulnerable youth possess high levels of these positive characteristics, their employment outcomes remain poorer than those of youth from more advantaged backgrounds again highlighting the impact structural inequalities have on employment prospects (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Hardgrove et al., 2015; Howieson & Iannelli, 2008).

There is some suggestion that exposure to skills-building and goal setting activities improves the employment prospects of vulnerable youth because these programme elements compensate for missing educational credentials and they also help boost individual-level factors such as confidence and a hopeful outlook which then facilitates active job searching (Frøyland, 2018; Gates, Pearlmutter, Keenan, Divver & Gorroochurn, 2018). Others have reported that vulnerable youth develop the confidence to articulate more ambitious employment goals when provided with opportunities to engage in work. This means that direct exposure to workplaces is key to effective support (Bynner & Schoon, 2003; Leventhall, Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). While there are debates about how much work young people should undertake while still engaged in education, early involvement in part-time work has been found to be protective for youth whose family and peers have low levels of labour market attachment (Cinamon, 2018; Leventhall et al., 2001). Furthermore, because being unemployed substantially increases the risks of remaining unemployed, early exposure to work may be protective for vulnerable youth (Howieson & Iannelli, 2008).

There are numerous investigations into the impact that risk behaviours such as substance use, delinquency and depression have upon employment outcomes, all of which suggest that these individual risk factors negatively impact upon young people's employment prospects. Thus, youth with high levels of individual risks face particularly acute challenges in securing and retaining jobs (Baggio et al., 2015; McLaren, 2003). However, risk behaviours can also play a protective role. For instance, vulnerable youth report substance abuse as a self-soothing strategy adopted in the absence of access to more prosocial coping resources (Baggio et al., 2015). There is thus complexity around individual level risk behaviours that need to be understood before services and policies intervene in young people's lives because such intervention may disrupt carefully constructed coping behaviours and leave youth less able to manage their lives as a result.

Of course, these individual challenges are embedded in relational and contextual issues that can seriously compromise the capacity of vulnerable young people to effectively engage in the labour market. While some work points to the powerful influence that relational networks have upon the occupational journeys of vulnerable youth, relational factors remain relatively under-explored (Hardgrove et al., 2015; Wicht & Ludwig-Mayherhofer, 2014). Given the increasing significance of peer relationships in adolescence, it is surprising that the role of peers in the workforce transitions of vulnerable youth has not been given more research attention because risky behaviour by peers does undermine employment prospects (Sletten, 2011). On the other hand, positive relationships with parents have been found to facilitate movement into the workforce, and in these situations, parents comprise key proximal resources that can be drawn on to support employment transitions (Evans, 2007; Hardgrove et al., 2015). Of course, many vulnerable youth will not have close family who can be relied upon as positive resources (Foster & Spencer, 2011); vulnerable youth are often made vulnerable precisely because they do not have supportive family around them, but there may be other relational resources around youth that are positive and can be drawn upon for support.

Access to reliable non-familial adults who are positive and supportive, help young people cope with negative emotions and experiences while trying to find work (Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005). In addition to emotional and material support, these types of relationships also provide access to, and knowledge about how to use employment-rich networks (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). In these ways, the positive and constructive involvement of others in the lives of vulnerable youth can increase the likelihood of securing reliable work and support youth to remain engaged in the workforce (Galster, Santiago & Lucero, 2014).

Neighbourhood characteristics also have an influence on employment outcomes (Fauth, Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Galster et al., 2014). For example, unsafe neighbourhoods increase risks of long-term unemployment (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010). High levels of neighbourhood deprivation and risk erode optimism and foster hopelessness, which undermine youth capacity to actively seek and secure work (Swisher & Warner, 2013). The term 'fragile careers' has been coined to describe the situation where, by virtue of their circumstances, youth rely on restricted networks that are circumscribed by locality, but these neighbourhoods contain few opportunities for work (Walther, Stauber & Pohl, 2005, 231). On the other hand, unsafe neighbourhoods can also engender a strong sense of belonging and so bring positive identity resources (Peterson, 2011).

Of considerable interest to this study is the role that formal services might play in facilitating work transitions for vulnerable youth. In this regard, there has been a dramatic increase in the number and range of programmes that seek to assist these youth into viable work and alongside this, concerns have been raised that these programmes do not consistently result in improved employment outcomes (Gates et al., 2018; Lifshitz, 2017). Intervention components that have been found to be effective include: developing social and work related skills, interpersonal support, the provision of basic needs such as food and shelter, and hands-on work experience (Frøyland, 2018; Gateset al., 2018; Lifshitz, 2017).

THE DATA
TRYING TO FIND WORK

Of course, the young people in the study were not aware of the complexity and the debates in the literature about facilitators and barriers to successful employment outcomes. They confronted the more immediate challenges of trying to find a way of generating a sustainable income from the resources and supports they had to hand. They did believe that education was a critical ingredient in employment success and, consequently, that their lack of school qualifications was a major impediment to securing legitimate work. However, while they believed in the value of education, neither the survey data nor the interviews indicated that qualifications did actually play a role in better employment outcomes. It was notable that they took full responsibility for not completing their education despite the many external factors that had made school a hostile and unwelcoming place. When asked what they might have done differently, or what the school could have done to help, most expressed fatalism, suggesting that it was inevitable that it would have ended that way.

Believing that credentials were the pathway to secure work, most enrolled in post-school courses to try to build up a qualifications portfolio, and accumulated student debt in the process. Indeed many youth were encouraged to enrol in low-level courses that held little prospect of employment and less than a quarter reported that these courses resulted in a job. Thus, while they retained the belief that education was important, their actual experiences of finding work support the observations made in the literature, that education is not always a reliable pathway for vulnerable youth into work (Bessant, 2018; Howieson & Iannelli, 2008; Lifshitz, 2017; Miller & Porter, 2007; Peterson, 2011).

By the fourth interview, all but two of the young people were over the mandated school leaving age and the need to find a job loomed large in their minds. Across the following three qualitative interviews, the young people articulated a clear and overpowering desire to have a job. Securing a job was not straightforward however; it often required that they make a break with all their significant relationships and take a leap of faith on their own that work would deliver financial security and independence.

The need for a job was a commonly recurring theme in their interviews. It represented independence and the capacity to provide for themselves and their families/whānau. As can be seen in the quotations below, having a job was also tied into their growing sense of who they were and where they fitted:

Getting a job was successful, keeping me out of, off the street, and like spending more times with the family.

Being able to provide for my family is really good, that's how you know you're a proper son, a proper boy, or whatever it is you are.

Most often the young people's talk about employment was characterised by stress, anxiety and uncertainty. This had impacts on all aspects of their lives. Laura talked about her fear that she would not be able to find a job and it was more complex than this. If she did not have a job, she would lose her bed at the supported boarding house and faced the prospects of having to return to living on the streets:

I'm just so scared like I can't even sleep at night properly, I'm so scared I'm not going to get a job... because if I don't have a job I can't stay here so I will be back on the streets.

A job also represented a chance for the young people to build a sense of place within mainstream society. This was particularly important given the experiences of exclusion and lack of belonging that characterised education for most. In this sense then, in addition to the promise of financial security and independence, employment represented a critical opportunity to feel part of everyday life. As such, not only did it represent a benefit to the young person, it had a social significance as well representing an opportunity to become part of mainstream society and helping to hold them there. In his second qualitative interview, Hemi, who had a job at the time, described this as feeling like he was '*a normal': The role [the job is] playing? It's showing me… how to become a normal… how to become a man… mature enough… grow up….* This sense of normality had eluded many of the youth:

The unemployment rate of the youth in this study was considerably higher than the official unemployment rate for youth of the same age[3]. By the third survey, 23.3% of the youth had worked full time in the past year. While this was a significant increase over the previous two years, about one third of the youth (35%) remained unemployed. Similar patterns were also seen in the qualitative interviews; only two youth (1.8%) kept the same job across all three qualitative interviews, ten (9.3%) had some form of employment during this time, 31 (28.9%) entered the qualitative phase unemployed and remained so throughout. What these high levels of unemployment meant was that most of the young people needed to rely on some form of government income support, or upon illegal means of generating income. These matters are taken up in more detail below.

While employment status fluctuated throughout the research, even those who found work did not secure reliable positions that generated confidence they could begin to build their lives as self-sustaining, independent adults. They used a diverse range of strategies to try to find work, and worked hard to build and retain a positive outlook on their prospects, bringing ingenuity and energy to their job-seeking. At times they sought the support of employment placement organisations such as Work and Income NZ (WINZ, the state income support and employment agency), and they also accessed a range of private and NGO providers. Of these, NGO providers were more useful, the statutory and private providers were considerably less so. In the qualitative interviews those youth who did manage to find work, reported that personal networks were their most reliable source of support in job-finding. Just over half reported that kin, friends and others in their personal networks had played a role in helping them to find work. Often this could be a chance encounter with an employed adult leaving the young person deeply grateful but also aware of the unpredictable and arbitrary nature of the job-finding process. For instance, over the six interviews the ebbing and flowing of Trent's fortunes in the labour market were observed:

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[3] Statistics NZ (n.d.) notes that 20% of youth aged 15-19 years and 9.3% aged 20-24 years were unemployed in 2018.

Trent's story

Trent left mainstream school at 14 years because of bullying. He then attended alternative education and completed NCEA Level 2. His interviews give an intense sense of feeling like an outsider and worrying that he would never be accepted. He was flatting at the time of the first qualitative interview (the fourth interview overall) and working for one of his flatmates as an out-source contractor installing satellite dishes. During this time, he had little income of his own and did not know from day to day if he would have any work at all. This caused repeated problems with WINZ due to the constant fluctuations in his income. He recounted numerous stressful encounters with WINZ caseworkers and ongoing fear that he would be unable to pay rent and be evicted. He talked about how his life felt directionless. He spoke of black depression he could not get on top of, and a sense of alone-ness engendered by his lack of employment. Between the first and second interviews, he had worked in a casual job and was enrolled in a work-skills programme. However, reflecting his experiences of school, the course expelled him because of gossip about him among course participants. This served only to further reinforce his sense of being an outsider. A difficult year followed with periods of sleeping on the streets. By the third qualitative interview (the final interview in the study), his situation had changed dramatically. He had unexpectedly run into the neighbour of his grandfather, whom he had spent time with as a child, and learned that a builder was looking for an apprentice. The neighbour provided introductions and suddenly at 22, Trent's life was transformed.

The survey data reinforced this role that supportive adults from within youth networks could play in finding work (see Table 6). Of all the relational dimensions included in the survey (see The Survey), this measure of access to support from adults, was the only relational measure that contributed to positive employment outcomes. In addition to this support, the survey data also highlighted that two other factors played a significant role in better employment outcomes:

1. Early exposure to work predicted later achievement of full time employment, and

2. Early accumulation of employment skills facilitated better employment outcomes.

Thus, rather than the wide range of individual and contextual factors that have been found to influence employment pathways elsewhere, for the youth in the current study, tangible connections to the labour market were the most important factors in young people finding work, along with reliable support from at least one positive adult in their own networks.

As school and education faded out of their lives, their sense of themselves came to rely increasingly heavily upon the idea of having a job. When unable to achieve this, they felt the failure intensely. It seemed to represent an authoritative exclusion from mainstream society. This feeling of exclusion held major risks for the young people. As noted in the quotations below, they did not typically have family to return to when things went wrong and so had to either engage with formal systems or draw on their own coping resources and to try to gather together the resources they needed to survive:

> I don't have family or anything so it's really hard, like I can't just be like "oh that's alright I'll just go live with my aunty now" or something.

> And then you have those other people like WINZ that just think that you're just trying to use them for the money, and it's like, 'no, I'm like, a teenage girl and I don't have my parents to help me out or anything like that'.

Table 6. Multivariate model (GEE analysis) of the associations between employment outcome (full-time employment) and predictors (Time 2 and Time 3).

Predictor	Employment status	
	β	SE
Demographic and baseline factors		
Age	.26**	.09
Gender	-.63**	.20
Employment status (Time 1)	.44**	.15
Time-dynamic factors		
Employment goals and skills		
Employment skills	.08*	.03
Individual Resources		
On track with education	-.69***	.18
Relational Resources		
Access to support	.07*	.03

† $p<.10$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$
Note: Only statistically significant ($p < .05$) predictors displayed

Work offered the possibility of moving away from the intense involvement of systems in their lives; something that had featured prominently for many during childhood. Jermaine, who was serving the last part of his custodial sentence at home, spoke of this:

Jermaine's story

I've had systems in my life forever, first CYF took me away from mum, then YJ (youth justice) and now prisons. I've got fines I have to pay back, and debts to WINZ from overpayments they made but didn't tell me about until it was huge - $2500. I will never pay all that back. I feel trapped, I will never be free, able to run my own life. I get snapped because WINZ schedule appointments at the same time as Probation, and WINZ don't clear their texts, but I can't call them because I have no minutes on my phone, so who do I let down? Probation and go back to prison, or WINZ and get my benefit cut? It never ends…I missed a third probation appointment, but I'd rung her up and said, "I can't afford to pay my rent if I don't go to work today", but the message didn't go through soon enough and I already got breached, and then I was back up in court for breach… it counts as another conviction. It just piles on, piles on, and, you know. I haven't offended since I got out of jail… the only thing I've been in the system for since then, is breaching. There was no leeway. One time I said, "I have my daughter this time". They mixed it up and said, "no, you had your daughter that time not this time". Well, you know, I just said "well whatever youse are proposing, I will go with that". They said, "community detention"… I said, "you know, how are youse expecting me to get out and do my job searching if, youse are just going to put me on a bracelet". So they did a 7pm – 7am curfew. One more month and then I should be off it for good, I should be off the system for good, hopefully, that's if they don't find something else to, you know, slap me with….It's one offence, and then heaps and heaps of breaches around small, trivial things… I got pulled up one time driving, they said, "you know, you haven't been in the system in a while", and I said to them, "that's what I'm trying to do, you know, I'm trying to stay out of the system, to better myself" Even the judge said it. My main thing is hopefully all my fines are paid in five years, you know… hopefully all my fines are paid in 5 years. Maybe by then, maybe I can start to pay a mortgage… maybe start a family. But, get the system off my back, you know, hopefully, just want to be free of all the pain and stress….It's not easy, it's like that stuff, once you're in the system, it's really, really hard to get out, even though you're trying really hard. The odds are stacked up against me. But I put myself in front of them, but at the same time I don't deserve to carry on for that long in pain and stress.

The survey data highlighted the dangerous combination individual risks, contextual risks and inappropriate institutional responses such as school exclusions could have on young people's attempts to extract themselves from the systems that were involved in their lives (see Figure 3). The unreliability of the adults around the young people reinforced for them the need to be independent and in part explained their strong connections with peer groups, even when they were profoundly anti-social (Sanders, Munford, Liebenberg & Ungar, 2017). The net effect of these experiences was that the youth faced substantial disadvantages when they came to seek work. Their default coping strategies were unlikely to help them find work and to sustain themselves in employment. Furthermore, their past experiences often meant that they were unlikely to see formal helping agencies as a reliable source of support. The self-reliance they had developed in order to survive got in the way of them being able to seek and accept help. These then became mutually reinforcing patterns, creating damaging downward spirals of desperation and choices that then created more risks that took them further away from their goals of finding sustainable, legitimate work. Some young people, however, did find work and attention now moves to the experience of having a job.

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

While finding secure work was a challenge, and one that eluded most of the youth, sustaining themselves in work, once employed, brought its own challenges. Most of the young people came from households with only tenuous connections to the workforce, and so had limited exposure to the behaviours and orientations required of a full-time worker. Rather than concrete skills and experience then, they brought their imaginings of what going to work each day might look and feel like. This did not always fit well with the experience of being a worker and thus they struggled to fit in and feel that they might belong in their workplaces. The minority of youth who knew people with jobs fared better than those who did not. These youth had support to make the transition to going to work regularly as well as the support to help them fit into their workplaces.

Once employed, many of the young people reported workplace exploitation or being required to perform dangerous tasks without safety equipment or training. While they knew they were learning and needed to be willing to take on allocated tasks, equally they felt expectations of them were often unreasonable, sometimes illegal. They recognised their vulnerability and that they had limited capacity to ask for fair and safe treatment. All of the young people were taken on under the 90-day trial rules, and for many, their employment ceased when the 90 days expired:

They [WINZ] end up chucking you into a course and then from that course you end up getting a job through that course, but then that only lasts so long 'cos of the 90 day trial. So then you are right back where you started but you have to explain to WINZ you lost your job, and you are stood down again.

At least like one [a job] that will last, not 90 days. That 90-day trial or whatever. I want a job that will last years, not 90 days. I done that before where they just want you to do work that the other lazy employees don't want to do, so they'll just have you in there for so long, and then "Aw, I don't need you", which sucks, I don't like that. Just really want a job.

Employment that ceases at the 90-day point is defined as dismissal. Consequently, when employment ceased at the conclusion of the 90-day trial period, youth typically faced a 13-week wait until they could receive Income Support payments. Thus, while the youth were highly motivated to find work and willing to work hard, their experiences of work were difficult, and their feelings about it were complicated, often changing as their work status changed. Underneath this was an enduring sense of vulnerability often expressed as a fear that they did not know what to expect from one day to the next when in a job, and as anger when without work and needing to engage with WINZ (see later):

When I think about it now, I don't want to go back there, I don't want to go back to the corner, don't want to go back to sleeping next to the rubbish bin, I don't want that.

Imagining an ideal job

Despite the uncertainties and the challenges, some of the young people dreamed of ideal jobs they would like to have, one day. There were two different types of dream jobs and youth were split almost evenly between them. The first type of dream job involved intense physical work, into which they could throw themselves. These jobs would take them outdoors and often away from the risks of getting into the trouble that featured in their lives. These dreams thus represented desires to be able to control the risks they confronted in their daily lives. The other type of dream job involved work in the community, whether it was youth work, social work, teaching, health care, the police or the fire service; in these dreams, youth expressed a powerful desire to give back to their communities and to support other youth so that they could avoid the struggles and pitfalls they had experienced themselves. Neither sets of dreams were fanciful or idealistic; the young people detailed their plans and the efforts they had taken to move towards their dreams:

So I decided on registered nursing instead of enrolled nursing. I heard that there's not much of a call for enrolled nurses anymore. They'd rather pay more for a Registered Nurse who can hand out medication or pay less for just a health care assistant….I've have been ringing a whole bunch of employers. My boss has said the same thing as my last bosses, about making sure I do my Registered Nursing once I have finished my Level Fours. We're meant to finish at the beginning of December but I have sort of fallen quite behind in my studies because I am working full time at the same time.

Charmaine's story

More often than not, circumstances conspired against the young people or they came up against hurdles that seemed insurmountable and without the supports and resources to overcome them, most abandoned their dreams. For instance, Charmaine had nurtured a life-long dream to become a teacher. She had overcome many obstacles throughout her childhood because of long-term exposure to family violence. She had watched her siblings each succumb to the effects of this exposure, and decided that she would not follow in their footsteps. Through her high school years, she often lived independently of her family, working part time jobs alongside her study so that she could pay rent and support herself. She graduated from high school, completed a pre-entry course at Polytechnic and proceeded to University. She found University difficult to adjust to; a sense of not belonging overwhelmed her and she struggled to support herself financially and complete her studies. By the second year, she had abandoned her dream and was working in an administrative job. She talked of her grief at letting go of her dream; it had been a powerful force that kept her focused during high school and without it, she felt disconnected from herself and her future.

Across the 6 years of data collection, the young people experienced many high and low points. At the high points, they articulated delight at being able to be self-sufficient, a passion to give back and intense desires to be role models and mentors for younger siblings, relatives and other young people facing challenges. Several talked of wanting to have a job to make an adult relative such as a grandparent proud of them. At the low points, they talked of feeling trapped by systems and circumstances and a fatalism regarding their futures.

Experiences of systems and services with an employment focus

The young people should have been able to be confident that systems would respond to their desires to find work and their need for income support while they did this. This section considers the young people's experience of organisations and systems that provide that income support and assistance with finding work. It first explores their experiences with WINZ, the largest organisation in the employment domain, both in relation to income support and finding work. Attention then moves to experiences with private labour-hire firms and NGOs that assist youth with job hunting.

WINZ

During 2018, the issue of the culture and attitude of WINZ staff to its clients became a topic of public debate. Many of the stressful and humiliating experiences recounted by the young people in this research were publicly repeated by others through the media. There was political acknowledgement that these attitudes towards WINZ clients were damaging and unacceptable. The Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, spoke of a need for a culture change and announced a review of the organisation. The young people in the research were well aware of the WINZ reputation for placing onerous, unreasonable requirements on recipients, for being unresponsive to situations of serious need, for confusing systems and negative, judgemental staff attitudes. As a result, they were reluctant to seek assistance from this agency. They tried hard to avoid having to apply to WINZ for any support or to seek assistance in getting a job. This meant that they were often exposed to significant risks and experienced high levels of material deprivation. Not only did they want to be independent, previous experiences made them wary of state involvement in their lives:

Allan's story

Allan was required to find work upon release from prison, and was told that he would lose his income support benefit if he did not secure a job. A criminal conviction for assault made him unattractive to potential employers. The regular reporting requirements placed on him by the Court once released also made it difficult for him to hold down a regular job. To assist with job seeking, WINZ had given him a letter to take to prospective employers promising a $5000 payment if they would employ him.

I thought that was epic [great] until they [WINZ] explained to me that if I got a job I would have to pay WINZ back that money. That is a huge amount of money on minimum wages, and because the jobs all have a 90-day trial, I could lose the job in 3 months, be on a 13 week stand-down for losing my job and still have to pay WINZ back. So I would be giving an employer $5000 of my own money to pay me. It stink

While Allan understood all too well the impact that his conviction had upon his attractiveness to potential employers, accepted responsibility for his offending and was nonetheless very motivated to find a job, he felt that having to pay an employer to employ him was both unfair and ultimately likely to be counterproductive. As he explained, at the end of the trial period, once his employer had used up the $5,000, he was likely to be let go anyway. His view was *"I may as well go back to dealing drugs, at least I know how to do that and it's reliable".* In the end Allan viewed mainstream society with a combination of cynicism and bitterness; his attempts to integrate he felt had been roundly rejected and so he returned to what he knew; house-breaking and drug dealing and the opportunity to build on his motivation for change, post-release from prison, was lost. He accepted that his life would feature regular periods in prison and simply got on with it as best he could.

As Allan found, WINZ involvement could mean having impossible conditions placed on any support given. Most of the young people had more experiences of systems failing to make a positive difference in their lives than they had of systems helping. This was especially true for interactions with WINZ. These youth had complex and fragile lives; they had few resources themselves and often could not rely on family/whānau to support them through hard times. In practical terms, what this meant was that despite their earnest desires to avoid contact with WINZ, they often needed to seek its support.

Only five of the 107 youth in the qualitative interviews reported positive experiences with WINZ. Rick was one such youth, and he reported that by providing financial assistance WINZ had helped him and his partner reach independence. WINZ had also put him in contact with a useful work skills course. His experiences might be thought of as a common sense expectation of what an engagement with WINZ would be like. However, his experiences and those of the four other youth who reported positive interactions with WINZ were so uncommon as to be distinctive. Indeed, the most common themes related to WINZ were stress caused from procedural factors such as changes to entitlements and requirements, misleading information, miscommunication and stand-downs and negative, humiliating and judgemental staff attitudes. These experiences were endemic across all but five of the interviews and they combined to render the young people seriously compromised in their capacity to reach the secure and prosocial independence they so strongly desired. The young people described seeking income support assistance as a last resort taken in desperation, and some even gave examples of refusing to apply for assistance despite being unemployed, in desperate financial circumstances, and with no other legitimate means of financial support.

Procedural Issues

The young people explained that the processes and systems of WINZ exacerbated the stresses they were confronting and accentuated their anxieties. Nicholas explained it in this way: '*They're too much into pressuring you into getting a job, rather than be with you and help you find a job*'. Young people were surprised that WINZ did not substantively help them find work. They explained that staff demanded that they find work themselves and repeatedly threatened that their benefits would be suspended or cancelled if they failed. Amore described her experiences: "*It was shocking to me. I didn't know how to find a job, that was why I went there. If I knew how to get a job I wouldn't be there in the first place, no-one goes to WINZ first up*".

The young people were required to apply for five jobs a week using a combination of cold-calling and applying for advertised positions. They had to produce documentary evidence to prove they did this. Yet analysis of the qualitative data revealed that these were among the least successful methods of finding work. The young people knew this and talked of feeling trapped in a dispiriting process of needing to complete pointless tasks knowing that these activities were unlikely to result in a job. The young people who found jobs, most often found these through personal networks. Young people who had access to these types of networks did not need to seek support from WINZ. Those who did not have access to these types of resources had hoped that WINZ would be able to help them.

WINZ emphasised personal responsibility for finding work, yet many of the factors that influenced whether or not young people could secure a job were beyond their control. In this regard, Evans (2007, 89) has noted a strong link between being unemployed and a sense of lack of control which is turned back on the self so that individuals blame themselves for their circumstances. Yet, she argues, structural conditions play a far more significant role in an individual's employment experiences than individual failings or lack of motivation.

Elsewhere (Munford & Sanders, 2019) we have argued that concepts of shame and recognition (Frost, 2016) offer a framework for understanding the experiences of vulnerable young people. This enables analysis of young people's experiences that moves away from the blame and individual responsibility narratives that have shaped discourses around these youth and which have underpinned their experiences of interacting with WINZ (Oliver & Cheff, 2014; Roberts, 2010; ti Riele, 2006). Indeed, descriptions of shame were recurring themes in their discussions of interactions with WINZ.

Given their childhood experiences, shame was a familiar emotion. Interactions with WINZ could trigger powerful emotional reactions that were based not only in the immediate negative encounter, but that also surfaced past experiences of being blamed for matters that were beyond their control. Rather than recognising that the adults around them had failed them, they often took responsibility for their circumstances and then experienced shame when they could not meet the expectations of others (Aaltonen, 2013; Evans, 2002; Zipin et al., 2015). These feelings of course, transferred into their interactions with WINZ because of the punitive, controlling and blaming responses of the staff they encountered when asking for help. For instance, some young people reported that WINZ staff recommended they borrow money from friends and family/whānau first rather than seeking their entitlements from WINZ. This led to the impression that "*they make you feel like you can ask them for help but when it comes to that time they're the first to tell you 'no', go somewhere else*".

Misleading information, miscommunication and stand-downs

Miscommunication and inaccurate information were common experiences with WINZ. This included miscommunication between different WINZ offices, poor communication within WINZ offices, poor communication from WINZ offices to young people and poor communication between other state agencies and WINZ. It also featured the provision of incorrect information that then resulted in delays for the young person in getting income support benefits paid.

> **Kaia's story**
> Kaia had returned to her parents' house in another town when her part-time job failed to provide sufficient income to pay her bills. She was looking for a new job but needed income support in the meantime as her parents could not afford to support her. She was considering being an exotic dancer if she could not find anything else, and in the meantime was trying to get benefit payments sorted out. She applied for a six-week military-style boot camp run through WINZ that was intended to make participants more employable. She explained that the WINZ office had misled her by telling her she was subject to a stand-down when she moved home. Her file was passed between multiple people in multiple offices, and in this process, her forms were lost, resulting in delays in payments:

Kaia's story (continued)

Coz there was, when I first [moved back with my parents] I was working casually and if you leave a job, a full time job, you have to go on a 13-week stand down. But because I left a job that was only giving me on average 7.2 hours a week, the WINZ people tried to tell me that: "oh no you have to go on the stand down" and I was like: "no, I don't, and all this". And then the other day, there were four different people that I had to see and they all pretty much just like filled my head up with lies and then we got the [information on the boot camp] thing. I had to go back into WINZ the other day because the guy lost my forms, my application. That's why I have not been accepted yet because he lost them and he never told me until last Friday when I sorted them out.

Kaia was eventually accepted onto the boot camp but left after the first week because it was too physically demanding, only then did she discover that she was subject to a stand down for having prematurely left the course. With no other way of earning money, she did end up becoming an exotic dancer, a job that she left when she saw a member of her family/whānau at work. With no source of income, she had to leave home again, moved cities and became a sex worker. This led directly to a gambling habit and a serious drug addiction; an addiction she was still struggling with in the third qualitative interview (the final interview for the study).

Kauri also reported problems because he had irregular hours of work that needed to be supplemented with a benefit. WINZ had instructed him to declare any income he was receiving when it exceeded a certain threshold of hours. Kauri's hours were always under this threshold. WINZ knew from the Inland Revenue Department (tax department, IRD), how much Kauri was earning, and they determined that he was over the income threshold despite the advice he had been given to the contrary. Rather than contacting him and informing him that he was over the income threshold, without his knowledge WINZ created a debt for him relating to these overpayments. At a later stage when he attempted to get off the benefit WINZ informed him that he owed them over two thousand dollars. Kauri could not imagine how he would ever be able to repay this debt.

Stand-downs could be as long as 13 weeks during which government income support was either reduced or suspended because the recipient had failed to comply with a regulation or requirement. This was not always due to the young person's actions, or inactions. Sometimes it was a result of a WINZ staff member not communicating with the young person so that they received the information they needed:

Thomas and Aroha's Stories

Thomas recounted one such experience. He felt like he was doing reasonably well, working at a reliable full time job and living with his partner who was about to give birth to their child. Their son was born between the first and second qualitative interviews. His partner had post-natal depression and pressured him to spend a lot of time with her after work, which led to him not getting enough sleep. This eventually lost him his job, and he found shortly thereafter that he could not go on the benefit because he was subject to a stand-down for being fired from his job. Following this, his relationship ended, and since his partner owned most of the furniture and his mother and sister, who sided with his partner, owned the rest, he wound up living in an empty house with his infant son. In order to generate an income while on stand-down, he returned to selling drugs because he had no other source of income.

Aroha also talked about poor communication with WINZ. In her case, this arose from her caseworker attempting to contact her. She was on the Independent Youth Benefit at the first interview, a specific benefit paid to young people aged 16-17 years who do not have support from their families. Her WINZ caseworker suspended her benefit several times because Aroha did not respond to messages he left on her phone, despite the fact that Aroha had repeatedly told him that she did not have sufficient money to clear voice messages. Her caseworker was either unwilling or unable to pay attention to the constraints on communication posed by Aroha's financial circumstances, and as with many other young people interviewed, she was financially punished for communication mistakes that originated in the WINZ office.

Stress and uncertainty

Other youth expanded upon the issue of stress and uncertainty created by different WINZ staff giving conflicting information that created confusion and often resulted in missed entitlements. For instance, some staff told youth that benefits were available to help cover certain expenses, while others denied this. Youth also reported that application forms were repeatedly lost, that they were asked over again to provide information already given or it appeared they were drip-fed requests for further information that seemed to have the objective of delaying payments. Youth also reported that applications for assistance were repeatedly declined without explanation. Not only did these experiences cause stress and anxiety, they also often left them in the position of having no money to support themselves. As a result, youth were frequently placed at risk because they needed to rely on others to cover their needs. The final part of this section addresses the offending issues that arose from being placed in this type of situation.

Equally of concern, were the instances where lack of money meant a young person needed to rely on a predatory or abusive adult because they had no other means to support themselves.

Judgemental attitudes

Judgemental attitudes regarding beneficiaries in society more generally seemed to be strongly reflected in the attitudes of many WINZ staff in their dealings with the young people. Repeated appointments made by WINZ where young people would have to wait in line for lengthy periods for a five-minute meeting, where they confirmed they had failed to find work the previous week reinforced these feelings of being judged and blamed. Of course, the young people were also acutely aware of broader societal attitudes to young people that defined them as undeserving, particularly when they needed support from the state. These negative stereotypes led to the young people deciding to use their own capacities to generate income rather than seeking income support (see below for discussion of unemployment and offending). This typically meant that they would either offend or participate in the black economy. Either way, judgemental attitudes negatively impacted upon their fragile sense of self-worth and their capacity to care well for themselves.

During the second interview, Tamati had been trying for some time to get a job and had resorted to applying for a benefit. He felt very ashamed about his situation. Hemi was also ashamed of being on the benefit and was unwilling to spend money he did not feel like he had earned himself, instead choosing to give all of his weekly entitlement to his mother. Several participants reported feeling judged and looked down on by WINZ staff:

> ### Maraea's Story
>
> When asked about people who had been unhelpful in her life, Maraea explained that WINZ staff had looked down on her for trying to seek financial support as an independent youth with no other means of making a living:
>
> *And then you have those other people like WINZ that just think that you're just trying to use them for the money, and it's like, 'no, I'm like, a teenage girl and I don't have my parents to help me out or anything like that'.*

EXPERIENCES WITH OTHER PROVIDERS

In addition to needing to approach WINZ for help, at times the youth also needed to seek help from other organisations. Across the interviews, the tension between being self-reliant and being able to accept help from formal services was clearly apparent. That said, a third of the young people reported that they had received support from agencies other than WINZ in their efforts to find employment. For instance, Kahurangi had tried to find work through a temping agency that placed labourers. He would leave home at 4am to arrive at the agency's premises by 6am. From that point on his day consisted of waiting around to see if anybody wanted to hire him. He said there were often over a hundred people waiting for work, and that "*not even half of us would get a job sometimes*", which he found to be extremely disheartening. In a similar way, Mary, Harry's PMK, spoke about how he had been involved with a private company that specialised in automotive training and finding youth work in the automotive industry. On numerous occasions, they had set up interviews for him, but when he attended these, they informed him that the firm was no longer hiring, or the position was filled. Mary witnessed the disheartening impact this had on Harry. She also observed other negative impacts from Harry's time with this company. Most notably, due to the high number of gang-related people in the programmes, Harry became a gang associate.

Rick had been involved with psycho-social services for a significant period of his life. He was grateful for their intervention in his early teens when the child welfare service removed him from his mother's home, due to drug use. He was placed with his father, who was clean of drugs and had a very strong work ethic. His father gave him practical experience in working. Rick also reported a positive experience with a Youth Justice intervention which assisted him in getting a driver's license, and setting up a bank account; two things that made a substantive improvement to his employment prospects.

Waimarie had used an NGO Youth Transitions Service (YTS). This agency encouraged her to think about what her dream job might be; something she had never allowed herself to think about prior to this. The service helped her complete a CV, set up a bank account and obtain an IRD (tax) number. Initially she did not understand why she needed these things, but as they worked with her, she came to understand that these things would improve her job prospects.

Kauri also used this service and his view was that they were the only organisation that had provided any real help to him in finding work. Like others who talked about the YTS, he said that they helped him put together the CV that he still used, and importantly, that they were non-judgemental and helped him remain positive about finding work.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND OFFENDING

The young people talked about the strategies they used to cope with the uncertainty about finding work. Some stole and sold drugs to generate money that then reduced the pressure to find work. Others used substances to numb their feelings and control their anxieties:

> **Kimiora's Story**
>
> At the first interview, Kimiora had taken on sex work when her government income support benefit was suspended for 13 weeks, leaving her with no means to support herself. She was able to live at the brothel, and through this saved some money and began planning to find a "*stable, respectable job*". The sex work was challenging and she used drugs and gambling to cope. This drained her savings. At the second interview, she was living with her brother to try to deal with her addictions. Initially, this was successful and she began seeking work. However, she was evicted when her brother defaulted on rent. This led her back to sex work, and drugs and gambling again became her coping strategies. At the third interview, she talked about again trying to break this pattern. She lived at a boarding house, stopped gambling and using drugs, and re-started her savings plan. However, she was evicted and the cycle began again.

Many youth talked of wanting to make substantial changes, to stop offending and using substances and become what Hemi described above as 'a normal'. As noted above, Thomas returned to selling drugs to feed himself and his baby after he lost his job: "*So right now I am dealing [selling drugs] as my job….Yeah, if I had a job, I reckon I would stop, 'cause when I was working I did stop".* As seen in Kimiora and Thomas's situations, circumstances did not always combine in ways that enabled youth to make these changes.

Not all young people offended for survival, however. Mathias had strong emotional bonds to a negative peer group that repeatedly drew him back into illegal behaviour. His biggest worry at the second interview was that if he could not find a job he would not be able to resist the pull of this group. He knew unemployment posed risks of ongoing offending because offending was connected to a positive sense of self as a strong, street-wise and independent young man. For Mathias, his life held more examples of people who provided for their families through offending than through legitimate employment; as a result he struggled to know how to find a job and to believe that legitimate work would sustain him.

At the same time as offending was familiar, and often more reliable than regular work, an offending history got in the way of securing work.

For instance, Brian talked about how his offending history created barriers for him in gaining secure employment. He had lost a number of jobs in the past due to prison sentences. He actively pursued work when out of prison by using his own personal networks. At one point, he secured a building and renovation job by talking to his neighbour's friend and following a subsequent prison sentence, he managed to find another job through another neighbour, this time as a painter. Indeed, personal networks were the most effective job-search strategy across the study. This was seen in both the qualitative interviews and in the survey data, where access to a supportive adult was linked to better employment outcomes (see Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The young people articulated very strong ideas about independence and self-sufficiency and all except one expressed a clear desire for sustainable long-term, legitimate employment. They spoke clearly of their desire for reliable work that would provide them with a secure financial base. Most expressed a strong work ethic and dream jobs often involved physically demanding work. The priority they placed on being self-reliant and independent and their sense of themselves as strong and capable people could be seen in this work ethic. A key factor in physical work was that it would not require them to return to education so that they could avoid having to expose themselves to the trauma, humiliation and sense of exclusion embedded in their memories of education. Physically demanding work also reduced the risks that they would return to heavy drinking and drug use and would keep them away from negative peers and involvement with offending. Alongside this, the young people also talked in positive terms about the benefits they experienced when doing work that was physically demanding and the satisfaction this contained. For example, they talked positively about feeling fit and well as well as learning new skills. For others, dream jobs were chosen because they enabled the young people to make a positive social contribution.

Work, and the independence it promised, was critical to young people's positive self-image. Many had experienced criticism, mockery, and insults from friends, family/whānau, and strangers for being unemployed, while others had spent their childhoods in extreme poverty. Being able to provide for themselves was thus a psychological as well as practical necessity. For some, their ability to provide for themselves and others was tied into the gender norms they felt were required of them, or to their ethnic identity. Furthermore, their early experiences of not being able to rely consistently on adults to care for or support them meant that they learned early to be self-reliant (Munford & Sanders, 2014). As a result, being financially independent was hugely important to the worth they attached to themselves and to their sense of security.

Almost all of the young people experienced being unemployed over the period of the interviews, many had periods of unemployment prior to the study, very few were employed throughout the research. With no other outside resources to call on they should have been able to rely on formal services to assist them with their survival needs and with finding secure employment that would provide a pathway to financial independence. Instead, the stigma of seeking help and past experiences of professional involvement in their lives, often kept them away.

While youth who are more fortunate can experience the transition into the workforce as stressful and uncertain, the more limited human, cultural, social and economic capital available to the youth in the current study accentuated all of these vulnerabilities (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). This meant that even when they did secure legitimate work, they remained vulnerable to even quite small fluctuations in their circumstances that would undermine the tentative stability they had created. While these youth were highly independent, the extent to which they could establish and maintain a sense of control over their circumstances was, as others have argued, tenuous at best (Roberts, 2010).

Those youth who became involved with agencies as part of their efforts to find work more often than not found them to be unhelpful. While there is an emerging debate in the literature about the best way of supporting marginalised and vulnerable youth into employment, there is a strong international consensus that when education and family have failed young people, employment becomes the critical, final opportunity to create integrative pathways for them (Frøyland, 2018). Social institutions thus become critical resources, as employers, on their own, are unlikely to offer sufficient opportunities to these young people to make a meaningful difference to their prospects (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; EGRIS, 2001).

The young people were striving to be independent and to provide for themselves. When organisations were able to provide meaningful support, they contributed to extremely positive results for the young person. Analysis of the qualitative data suggested that a consistent, positive relationship was the most important factor in successful employment outcomes and this pattern was also seen in the survey data. In the qualitative interviews, young people described the characteristics of interventions that were the most helpful in their job-seeking. These included being treated with respect and having their individual circumstances recognised and receiving both practical and emotional support.

When professionals took the time to listen to young people's accounts of their situations and their needs, and worked alongside them to help them reach their goals, tailoring the intervention to their particular circumstances, they were more likely to find work.

Successful support also involved sharing contacts and resources that the young people lacked, providing emotional support where this was required and attending to the many practical needs the young people had. When they were respectful, reliable and consistent, these services were in a unique position to make a substantive difference to the young people's lives. The provision of responsive, multi-layered support has been observed to make an important difference in the transition to employment of marginalised and vulnerable youth and it appeared that this pattern also characterised successful job support interventions in the current study (Aaltonen, 2013; Frøyland, 2018).

In the qualitative interviews, providers such as the YTS featured prominently in young people's descriptions of services that were most helpful with job-finding because of the supportive, responsive and multi-levelled approach they took. However, during the course of this research, the funding model for the YTS changed and they were no longer able to take this holistic, tailored approach.

As a general pattern, the young people reported that if they could possibly avoid this they would not seek support from WINZ, despite being eligible for support. Overwhelmingly, those who sought support from WINZ reported this experience as distressing, stressful, demeaning, intimidating, humiliating and frustrating. Communication issues within and between WINZ offices frustrated young people's efforts to remain compliant with WINZ regulations and this typically resulted in stand-downs. Judgemental attitudes of WINZ staff reported by the young people compounded these effects and made the youth reluctant to seek support. The approaches adopted by WINZ were ultimately counterproductive as they pushed the young people out of formal systems of support to increasingly rely upon themselves with the heightened risks around offending that this implied. While in the short term this may have resulted in fewer youth applying for state income support, even in the medium term these practices contained risks for the young people and the communities in which they lived. These coercive and punitive practices reinforced a larger sense of social exclusion and they also shifted costs from the income support to the mental health and justice systems, and to the communities in which the young people lived (Bonoli, 2010; Lødemel & Moreira, 2014).

The lives of the young people were characterised by disruption and uncertainty; they often found themselves needing to move locations at short notice. They worked hard to keep WINZ informed of changes of address and in employment status but they often found that the communication and record keeping within offices and between offices was not effective. Forms were lost, advice about entitlements varied depending on which staff member they were dealing with, and punitive decisions were made without warning.

The consequences for the young people in the study were that they could find themselves without any financial support for significant periods of time, or accumulating large debts of which they were often unaware, with no prospect of repayment.

These experiences were overwhelming. The WINZ stand-down policy in particular caused a lot of stress for young people. Turning down work that was offered or resigning from work over a certain threshold of hours resulted in a stand-down of anywhere between three and 13 weeks. This happened with young people who found themselves in jobs where they were mistreated, taken advantage of, or not physically able to keep up with the work. When they left these jobs, they found themselves facing a period of up to three months with no means of legitimately supporting themselves financially. While the logic of a stand-down is that it provides a disincentive to leave a viable job, the impact of a complete loss of income for up to 13 weeks was extreme and left the youth vulnerable to predatory adults and increased the risks that they would engage in criminal activity. Most often, the young people said that WINZ staff just did not care about the impact that these things had upon them.

Requirements to hand out a specified number of CVs or provide evidence of cold-calling at businesses were also experienced as dehumanising and dispiriting. This was particularly so for youth who had long periods of unemployment as they quickly realised that such strategies were ineffective in securing stable work. Indeed personal connections were the most successful job hunting strategies reported by youth. By definition, personal networks had failed to produce jobs for those who sought assistance from WINZ and what they therefore needed most were the connections and networks this agency should have been able to provide. However, there were no instances of WINZ providing access to networks that generated jobs for these youth. The role of networks in securing jobs is well recognised (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Frøyland, 2018; Higgins, Vaughan, Phillips & Dalziel, 2008) and thus it is not clear why interventions did not explicitly seek to build these resources around the young people.

Private employment companies often created similar stresses as those regarding interactions with WINZ. Inadequate communication could lead to agencies appearing distant, disorganised, and unable to respond to the particulars of individual young people's situations. The repeated setting up of opportunities for jobs that did not eventuate was also harmful, resulting in young people feeling disheartened, often leading to them giving up. The process of bringing together a group of candidates in one location created a fertile ground for young people to associate with a negative peer group, as those not chosen for work were left in one space with nothing to do for the remainder of the day.

This was particularly problematic because, as identified in the 'employment and offending' section, key factors in young people's offending were being unoccupied, not feeling in control of their lives, and spending time with negative peers.

Policies and operational processes of large departments of state often combined in ways that trapped young people, creating a sense of powerlessness and engendering a lack of confidence that systems designed to help would actually deliver meaningful assistance. Rather than enabling young people to build a meaningful, prosocial life, these policies and processes generated hopelessness and the youth could not envision how they might ever move forward with their lives.

The lessons for service provision include ensuring that programmes have strong networks with employers and employer organisations that include practical work-based experience and actively create viable pathways from the programme into the workforce. These are likely to have the largest impact on employment outcomes for vulnerable youth. In addition, supporting youth to create enduring relationships with positive adults who can facilitate access to the labour market and provide ongoing support is important. Such relationships provide networks, stability, learning and the encouragement to keep on trying when things go wrong. Being on track with education was not a strong factor in predicting successful employment outcomes in the survey data. However, this relationship is complex because those youth who were fully engaged in education (and thus more likely to be on-track with education) were less likely to be in full-time work. Careful attention needs to be paid to identifying the particular educational needs of individual youth, supporting them to identify the types of education that are most likely to provide them with access to secure work, and providing consistent material and emotional support to them during their post-secondary school journeys.

Finally, rather than focusing on risk behaviours such as substance use, programmes need to address the underlying causes of these behaviours because, based on the survey results, in themselves these behaviours did not appear to undermine the chances that youth would find work. Of course, offending and substance use carry long-term risks for youth and for society. In terms of programme development, then, it is important for professionals to focus on addressing the circumstances from which the risk behaviours emerge rather than the risks themselves. In this regard, effective programme responses will involve actions such as advocating for adequate government income support and safe accommodation, so youth do not have to resort to offending to survive, addressing the impact of long-term exposure to violence, abuse and neglect and exclusion from school as well as support to develop prosocial coping strategies when experiencing anxiety and uncertainty.

THE ROLE OF SERVICES IN CHANGE

A central concern of this research was understanding the characteristics of interventions with vulnerable, multi-system involved youth that made the most difference to their capacities to develop well. The preceding two sections have considered young people's experiences of education and of trying to find work. Attention now moves to their experiences of the range of psycho-social services that became involved in their lives as they moved between childhood and adulthood. The longitudinal and mixed method nature of this research provided an excellent opportunity to build a comprehensive picture of service experiences and the factors that made the most difference in the lives of these youth. The section begins with a review of the literature, paying particular attention to what is already known about relational practices and work with multi-system involved youth. It then considers the results of two sets of analysis of the survey data which identified that positive relational practices made an important contribution to better outcomes. Attention then turns to the qualitative interviews to explore in more detail young people's own accounts of the way that relational practices assisted them to make positive changes and the types of practices that made this more difficult.

THE LITERATURE

It is now well recognised that high levels of exposure to adverse experiences at home, at school and in the neighbourhood during childhood compromises the capacity of young people to experience good adulthood outcomes (Metzler et al, 2017; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Gretchen, 2005). Young people with high exposure to multiple adversities typically encounter more than one service delivery system (such as justice, child welfare, mental health and education support additional to mainstream programming) as they grow up (Berzin, 2010). This involvement should constitute a developmental asset for these youth (Mitchell, 2011). However, the evidence suggests that this is not necessarily the case and despite the larger volume of supports and resources this involvement implies, the long-term prospects for these youth are poor (Berzin, 2010; Garland, Aarons, Brown, Wood & Hough, 2003; Haapasalo, 2000; Haight, Bidwell, Marshall & Khatiwoda, 2014; Hazen, Hough, Landsverk & Wood, 2004). This could be because the higher the levels of risk, the more services are likely to become involved in youth lives. These situations, in turn, create greater challenges for service providers, and the more risks youth confront the harder it may be to facilitate positive outcomes. Multiple service engagement might also reflect a reduced capacity of young people to engage successfully with service providers.

However, the evidence suggests that poor adulthood outcomes for such youth are not solely attributable the combinations of risks they experience, to their openness or otherwise to professional involvement in their lives, nor to the quantity of resources available to them from within their own networks (Ungar et al., 2013). In fact, service quality has been found to explain more of the variance in outcomes for such youth than their characteristics, capacities, responsiveness and individual risk profiles (Cicchetti, 2010; DuMont et al., 2007; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005). Service delivery systems therefore are implicated when outcomes for vulnerable youth are poor.

Further complicating the picture is the complex relationship between the specific needs of vulnerable youth and the levels and types of service they actually receive. A "patchwork of organizations" (Ungar et al., 2013, 151) lacking coherence, coverage and consistency characterises the service delivery landscape vulnerable youth navigate (Dodge, Murphy, O'Donnell & Christopoulos, 2009; Swenson, Henggeler, Taylor & Addison, 2009). Here matters such as the types of services that are available in a given location at a given point in time have more influence over the type of services received than actual youth need (Dodge et al., 2009; Swenson et al., 2009). Compounding these issues is the relative absence of evidence concerning how to successfully intervene with young people when they are clients of multiple services and systems (Berzin, 2010).

It is in this context that attention is increasingly turning to understanding issues of service quality, and particularly the ways in which interventions offered by multiple service systems (e.g., child welfare, mental health, special education and juvenile corrections) combine to have an impact on outcomes for vulnerable youth (Berzin, 2010; Haight et al., 2014). There is a link between the quality of the relationships professionals build with vulnerable children and youth and better outcomes later in life (Bastiaanssen et al., 2014). Of course, multiple system involvement makes issues of service quality complex because of the different mandates, intervention modalities and resources available across these systems (Haight et al., 2014). Regardless of these system-level issues, it is critical to understand the ways that different services interact with each other, the combined and separate impacts they have on outcomes as well as with the ways in which these multiple services work with the resources contained within young people's own social ecologies, and the relationship of these to risk reduction, resilience enhancement and improved wellbeing (Berzin, 2010; Ungar et al., 2013).

While the challenges of getting service delivery right when multiple services are involved remains, a rich and diverse literature has addressed itself to the types of intervention practices that are most likely to contribute to better outcomes for vulnerable youth. For instance, the strengths-based literature, which had its origins in the disability field, migrated into child and family social work during the 1980s and 1990s and raised the idea of interventions that actively identified and worked with the resources and capacities of families, children and youth to potentiate better outcomes (Dunst et al., 1988; Scott & O'Neill, 1996). More recently, conceptual frameworks such as the ecological-transactional model (Brandon, 2010; Overstreet & Mazza, 2003), relational driven practice (Cooper, 2010; Ruch et al., 2010), and positive youth development (Lerner, 2005) have all focused upon specifying the types of practices that can be used to engage positively and constructively with clients in a shared process of growth and change. These approaches all document the efficacy benefits of practices that emphasise the careful development of positive, empowering relationships between professionals and clients. These relationships are based in respect, recognition of the realities and constraints imposed by the challenges clients face, and a willingness to work collaboratively with clients in a shared solution-finding endeavour. Importantly, these approaches are all able to be used regardless of service system or intervention modality.

We have argued elsewhere that respectful relationships are the cornerstone of effective interventions because they provide a safe and trusting context within which youth gain the confidence that when they voice their experiences and needs they will be heard, taken seriously and effective support will be provided (Sanders & Munford, 2019). Without this, interventions risk 'doing to' rather than 'working with' youth. Indeed, responsive and respectful interventions increase the resilience of young people with complex needs (Garland et al., 2003; Stathis, Letters, Doolan & Wittingham, 2006). By working in these ways, professionals help youth build their capacity to positively respond to crises after the intervention is complete and they move on with their lives. This is one way in which interventions can contribute to better than expected outcomes in the longer term (Sanders et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2011).

Empowering relationships communicate to young people that they are central to the intervention. They recognise and respect young people's developing autonomy and desire to be actively involved in shaping their own futures. They encourage youth to actively participate in decision-making processes, and support them to build their own resources and skills to manage their lives beyond the intervention. Strong relationships help build coping capacities by providing opportunities for emotional connection and attachment; factors that are often missing in the lives of these vulnerable youth but which, nonetheless, play a critical role in positive outcomes (Heinze, 2013; Schofield & Beek, 2009).

Given this, the process of building these relationships becomes a critical task for professionals, as the relationship is the mechanism by which interventions enable youth to move towards better outcomes. Lack of attention to building supportive, enabling and effective relationships may well explain why so many interventions do not seem to make a substantive difference to outcomes (Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2007). In thinking about relationship-building as a specific part of an intervention, Kroll has developed the idea of 'permitting circumstances'; work aimed at building the preconditions under which a relationship can be established. This is 'the art of getting started' (Kroll, 2010, 69). In paying attention to permitting circumstances, care is taken to ensure that young people feel sufficiently safe to be open to positive engagement as a first step in a larger process of support.

Helping facilitate change through the creation of empowering, enabling and enduring relationships is not just the province of professionals, however. The wider community of support young service users have access to can also be harnessed in the process of creating possibilities for positive change. For instance, a lifelong positive connection based in a trusting relationship with a foster family is a clear marker of positive outcomes for foster youth (Christiansen, Havnen, Havik & Anderssen, 2013, 721; Munford & Sanders, 2016b). When young people experience stability in care by remaining with a family for several years, they report better wellbeing and develop a sense of belonging that underpins better than anticipated outcomes (Biehal, 2014; Christiansen et al., 2013). Placement stability is fundamentally about strong relationships because these create the sense of belonging that foster youth often lack. Foster parents, siblings and extended family members are all involved in this process of strong, positive relationship building (Christiansen, et al., 2013; Munford & Sanders, 2016b). Trusting relationships with foster parents assist the young person to manage feeling different to other young people, overcome conflicting emotions about their birth and foster families and deal with the disruption of family life; all critical facets of better outcomes (Biehal, 2014; Madigan, Quayle, Cossar & Paton, 2013; Sinclair, Baker, Wilson & Gibbs, 2005).

Everall and Paulson (2002) provide another way of thinking about the approaches to building an effective support relationship. They argue for egalitarian, authentic and respectful interactions that demonstrate to young people that social workers understand them and that they are willing to support them as they work through the issues they confront. This is a long-term view of interventions that positions the professional as a co-driver on a journey with the young person. Being a co-driver, calls for communication that is relevant to young people and that directly involves them in decisions (Smith, 1991).

Practitioners can reduce power imbalances between young people and adults by encouraging active involvement of young people in decision-making, by enabling them to openly share their experiences and by demonstrating non-judgemental responses (Everall & Paulson, 2002; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; McLeod, 2007; Smith, 1991).

In a child protection context, creating a sense of safety is a critical precondition to effective practice (McLeod 2007; Jobe & Gorin, 2013). Without this feeling of safety, children and young people are unlikely to respond positively to professional intervention and will continue to use their own coping strategies. While it is understandable that young people and their parents may be reluctant to engage openly with child protection social workers, it is not inevitable that statutory interventions will be characterised by conflict, distrust or hostility. Indeed, better outcomes are achieved when social workers adopt clear and open communication styles and demonstrate that they understand the conflicts and tensions inherent in child protection practice (Marcenko, Brown, DeVoy & Conway, 2010; Platt, 2012). In creating a sense of safety, child protection workers directly and openly engage with the concerns about what their involvement in the young person's life might mean for them (Platt, 2012; Forrester, Westlake & Glynn, 2012). For instance, simple practices such as keeping clients informed of the rationale for decisions, identifying what the next steps are, keeping their word and not making promises they cannot keep, all increase levels of engagement with child protection interventions and lead to better outcomes (Gladstone et al., 2012; Hillian & Reitsma-Street, 2003; Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood & Vesneski, 2009; Palmer, Maiter & Manji, 2005; Roberston, 2005).

Young people bring their past experiences of professional involvement in their lives with them into each new encounter. The more vulnerable a young person is, the greater is the number of professionals that are likely to have been involved in their lives. When clients bring prior negative experiences of services into new helping relationship resistance is likely to manifest itself in their responses (Forrester et al., 2012). In these situations, the relationship-building skills of professionals become critical to success because they may well need to demonstrate repeatedly that they are different to the professionals who have come before them. This will require them to 'work effectively and creatively' with resistance rather than dismissing it, or labelling young clients as difficult (Trevithick, 2011, 389). The presence of resistance and its impact upon professional intervention must be taken into account, because it often explains why young people react defensively or defiantly (Forrester et al., 2012; Heron, 2005; Reimer, 2013; Ruch et al., 2010; Severinsson & Markström, 2015; Tassie, 2015; Trevithick, 2011, 2014; Watson, 2011).

Initially developed in psychoanalysis, resistance and the defences and defensiveness clients bring to the helping relationship need to be carefully understood and contextualised. Trevithick (2011, 393) offers two different ways of seeing resistance: either as a rational and conscious response that is appropriate to a situation (such as in the current study where young people avoided contact with certain adults in order to keep themselves safe), or as an indication of the 'troubled nature of a person's inner world' (Trevithick, 2011, 393). Here resistance is a manifestation of unconscious emotional responses to a threat or danger. The professional task in such situations is to work with the young person to understand the origins of this reaction and to then use it creatively to facilitate positive changes.

When the function resistance serves is understood it can be used constructively in encounters with young people (Guo & Tsui, 2010; Reimer, 2013; Watson, 2011). Rather than being avoided or responded to in punitive ways, resistance is seen as a rational and conscious response that serves a positive purpose for the young person (Trevithick, 2011). Resistance and rebellion are important strategies young people use to mediate power relationships and adversity. This means that learning to work positively with resistance should be a primary focus for practitioners.

This understanding of resistance and rebellion has its origins in the work of Foucault (Guo & Tsui, 2010, 236–237). For instance, Heron (2005, 348) uses Foucault's analytics of power to interrogate resistance as a strategy used by clients to negotiate power relationships and the impact of marginalisation. She argues for a need to conceptualise the client/worker relationship as a complex power relationship. When understood in this way, client resistance becomes a positive resource that professionals can use creatively to support youth to make changes. In this process attention must be paid both to the power the practitioner has over a client through their control of resources and decision making, and to the feelings of lack of control and choice clients experience in these helping relationships. From this standpoint, resistance is understood as a strategy that enables clients to gain a sense of control over their situation.

Severinsson and Markström (2015, 8) suggest that the concept of 'discursive resistance' can help practitioners to understand how vulnerable young people make sense of their worlds and reframe the many negative labels that have been ascribed to them. Resistance is more likely when young people are known primarily by negative labels that are based on some of their behaviours. Better outcomes are placed at risk when practice seeks to tightly control and contain clients within an unrealistic and narrow view of how a 'good' client behaves such as attending appointments, complying with strict conditions around behaviour and agreeing to particular interventions (Pollack, 2010). In the youth justice area, Shaw (2014) demonstrated these principles in action.

Interventions that focussed heavily on individual responsibility resulted in missed opportunities to facilitate pathways out of offending because professionals did not build a full understanding of all the issues faced by youth. However, better outcomes were achieved when practice sought a deeper understanding of young people's behaviour including understanding the contexts of their lives such as how they fended for themselves by seeking out their own resources and support (Shaw, 2014, 1834-1835). In such contexts, the capacity to effectively resist must be seen as a valuable survival skill.

Even in other mandated contexts, such as child protection work, resistance can be a positive resource that underpins good practice. Recognition that clients may experience intense emotions such as fear and shame and that they may not accept the need for professional intrusion into their lives is required (Forrester et al., 2012, 124). Again, the understanding of the meaning of resistance and positively engaging with it is the key to activating resistance as a positive intervention resource (Forrester et al., 2012, 118). As Shaw (2014) reported in the youth justice area, it is critical that professionals invest time in building a strong positive relationship and demonstrate they understand and value the strengths and capacities the young person brings to the intervention. As they do this they build a careful and clear understanding of the client's context and the ways in which they manage the challenges they confront. Here, resistance is framed as a positive strategy the young person has developed to manage a difficult and challenging life. Given the complexity of the issues vulnerable youth face, resistance in child protection contexts should be an anticipated response to professional involvement and perceived 'as a positive force rather than as something that must be defeated' (Severinsson & Markstrōm, 2015, 1). What this means is that resistance can be harnessed in interventions across service systems to facilitate positive change; to achieve this change practitioners need to embrace resistance, to understand the motivation behind it and the purpose it holds for clients (Watson, 2011, 465-467).

What the foregoing highlights is the importance of coming to a nuanced, multi-layered understanding of the young person in the context of their daily lives, taking account of the resources and supports they have available to them and then carefully positioning professional support so that it opens up positive change opportunities. Young people are active subjects located in a dynamic system, navigating through their social environments and making strategic decisions about how to manage the challenges they face (Haw, 2010). In intervention terms, the exercise of this agency is a positive resource professionals can use to leverage positive gains, but this resource only becomes available when a strong, positive relationship is forged by the practitioner with the young person.

Working with young people's agency means that the young person's own coping capacities and resources, even those that may appear as resistance, are in the forefront in the intervention. Authentic and genuine relationships with young people, enable practitioners to harness all of these resources and in the process, social services add to the social capital available to vulnerable young people (Barker & Thomson, 2015; Bolzan & Gale, 2012).

Against this background then, the longitudinal data set in the current study provided opportunities to explore the roles that services played in young people's lives and the contribution that different types of service delivery made to better outcomes.

THE DATA

A central concern of the current research was to identify the elements of interventions that young people said made the most difference to their capacity to overcome the challenges that confronted them and to develop well and thrive. To do this detailed qualitative and survey data was gathered on the nature of service experiences, the social ecology of youth and a range of outcome measures. This section considers both survey and qualitative data. It first addresses of survey data to identify broad patterns in relationships between service delivery factors (volume and quality of services), elements in young people's own lives, and outcomes. It then explores the qualitative data to unpack the subtleties of service experiences and the links these had with young people's capacities to navigate a safe course to adulthood.

THE SURVEY DATA - LINKS BETWEEN SERVICE FACTORS AND YOUTH OUTCOMES

Figure 4 details the impact that the two service factors (volume and quality) had upon youth outcomes over time, taking into account their own resource and risk profiles. It shows that that the better the quality of the service experience the more likely it was that youth would report positive outcomes. This benefit to youth was direct and sustained over time accounting for 14% of the variance in outcomes at Time 3 (see Figure 4). This points to an enduring impact that services can achieve with vulnerable youth if they pay attention to the quality of the support relationships that professionals build with youth. This impact was independent of the risks youth confronted in their lives and of the positive resources around them. Alongside this, the connection between service volume and quality service provision, although significant, was weak, suggesting a relatively minor connection between the total number of services that became involved in the lives of the young people and the likelihood that they would have a quality experience that then contributed to better outcomes. The model also shows that youth with the highest contextual and individual risks at Time 1 received the greatest volume of services.

Youth with the highest individual risks were least likely to receive quality services, while youth with the highest resilience were the most likely to experience such service delivery. Over time, quality service delivery did help to reduce contextual risks, but the involvement of more services in the lives of youth with the greatest contextual risks cancelled out these benefits. Other patterns of note in the model are that risks and resilience tended to endure; that is, a young person's risks and resilience scores at Time 1 were the strongest predictors of their status at Time 2. In terms of changes over time (see Table 7), resilience scores improved and individual risks declined suggesting a process of positive maturation among the youth surveyed. On the other hand, contextual risks remained relatively unchanged. Resilience status was the strongest predictor of youth outcomes (accounting for almost 40% of Time 3 outcome scores).
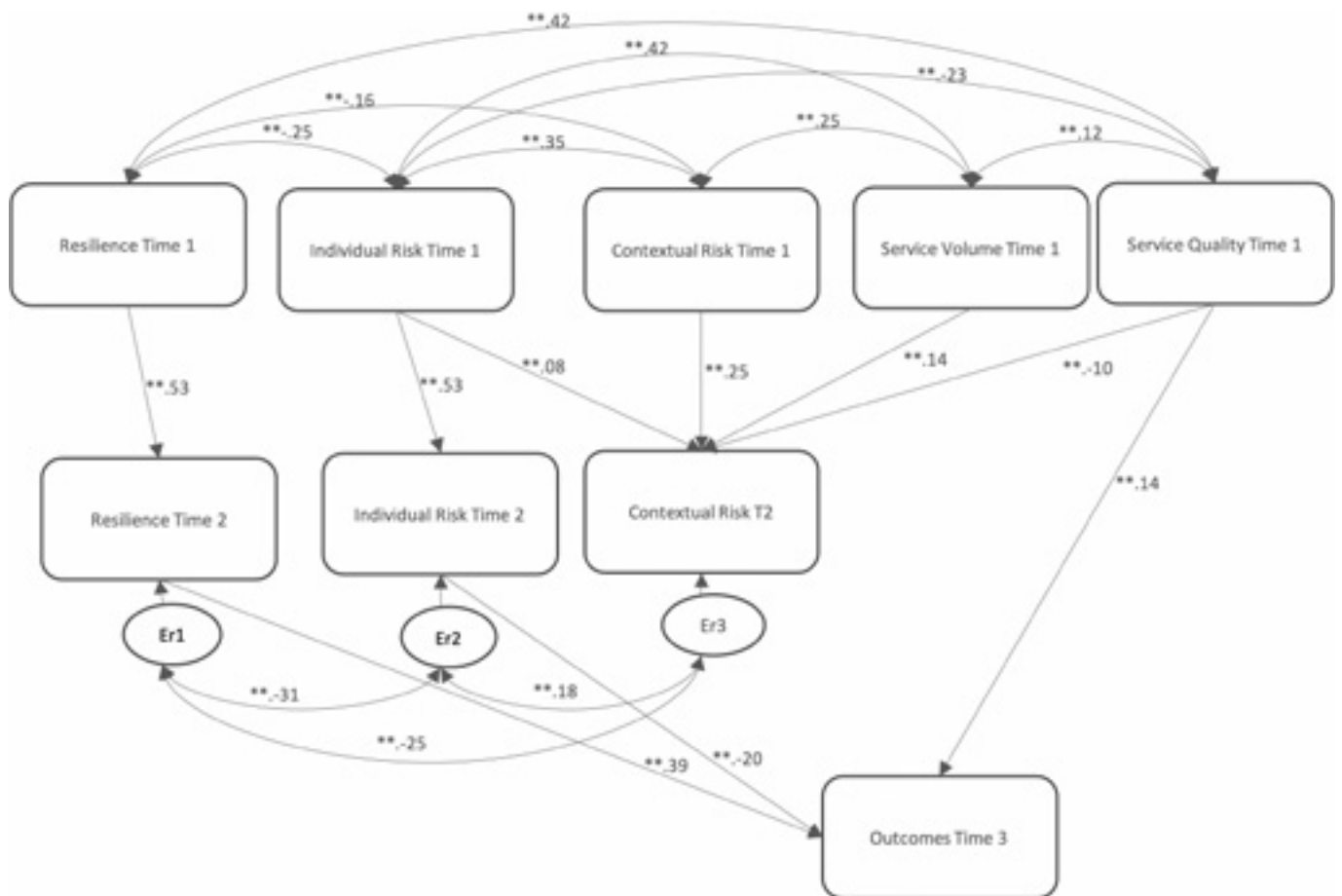
** p=.000, only significant paths shown

Figure 4. Path analysis showing long term impact of service quality on youth outcomes – survey data (significant paths only shown)

Table 7. Mean (SD) CYRM resilience, individual and contextual risks, Time 1 to Time 3.

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Resilience	104.08[a] (15.56)	105.79[b] (16.64)	106.25[b] (16.38)
Individual Risk	32.80 (13.20)[a]	28.60 (13.09)[b]	25.34 (12.19)[c]*
Contextual Risk	18.90 (4.71)[a]	18.28 (4.61)	18.06 (4.88)[c]

Note: Differing superscripts indicate statistically significant (p<.05) differences

*Linear trend is statistically significant (p<.05)

The findings reported above suggest that youth outcomes improve when professionals use positive relational practices, as represented in this case by the service quality measure. A characteristic the young people in this study share with most vulnerable youth is the involvement of many services in their lives and so issues around consistency in service quality across services becomes relevant. This raises the question – do all services involved in youth lives need to adopt such practices, or can a positive experience with one professional offset negative experiences with others?

To help explore this issue, the sample was divided into three groups based on their answers to the service quality questions which were asked regarding two services used at Time 1[4]. The sample was divided in the following way:

1. Consistently positive service quality – youth reported two positive service experiences (*n = 124)*,

2. Inconsistent service quality – youth reported one positive and one negative service experience (*n = 185)*,

3. Consistently negative service quality – youth reported two negative service experiences (*n = 197)*.

This grouping allowed for examination of the effects over time of consistency in the service quality experience on measures of resilience, risk and outcomes.

The analysis also controlled for the effects of positive relationships within youth own networks (family/caregiver, friends/peers and school). The sample was composed of all youth who completed the Time 3 interview (*n*=506) to enable assessment of outcomes.

Tables 8 and 9 indicate that over time outcomes and resilience across the three consistent service quality groups improved, and risks declined. The positive service quality group entered the study with better scores on the outcome and resilience measures and lower levels of risks and this relatively better position was retained at Time 3. Table 10 contains results of a MANOVA which indicates that youth who reported two consistently positive service experiences also reported better outcomes, more resilience and less risk than youth reporting inconsistent or two negative service experiences.

Table 8. Mean scores for the three service quality groups at Time 1 and Time 3 on the three dependent variables

| | Consistent service quality groups | | | | | | | | | |
| | Negative | | Inconsistent | | Positive | | | | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*f*	*df*	*p*	η^2
Outcomes Time 1	6.96	1.71	7.21	1.76	8.12	1.72	17.69	2	.000[1]	.065
Outcomes Time 3	9.25	1.85	9.24	1.75	10.12	1.62	11.45	2	.000[1]	.043
Resilience Time 1[2]	70.48	10.95	74.02	10.61	81.75	8.08	46.79	2	.000[1]	.157
Resilience Time 3	73.76	12.18	75.21	11.13	80.30	10.62	12.98	2	.000[1]	.049
Individual Risk Time 1	35.93	14.79	35.94	13.93	30.85	15.67	5.59	2	.004[1]	.021
Individual Risk Time 3	27.74	13.17	28.23	13.29	22.69	12.83	7.63	2	.001[1]	.029

[1] Result significant at the .05 level.
[2] Welch's *F*

Table 9. Multiple comparisons of Time 1 and Time 3 scores on the three dependent variables

	Positive: Negative (*p*)	Positive: Inconsistent (*p*)	Negative: Inconsistent (*p*)
Outcomes T1[1]	.000	.000	.349
Outcomes T3[1]	.000	.000	.998
Resilience T1[2]	.000	.000	.004
Resilience T3[1]	.000	.000	.432
Individual Risk T1[1]	.006	.012	.977
Individual Risk T3[1]	.002	.001	.929

[1] Tukey HSD
[2] Games-Howell

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[4] See Sanders & Munford (2014) for details of this analysis.

Table 10. Impact of service quality on outcomes at Time 3

| Time 3 | Consistent service quality | | | | | | | | | |
| | Negative | | Inconsistent | | Positive | | | | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*f*	*df*	*p*	η^2
Wellbeing	9.25	1.85	9.24	1.75	10.12	1.62	11.45	2	.000	.044
Resilience	73.76	12.18	75.21	12.18	80.30	10.62	12.98	2	.000	.049
Individual Risk	27.74	13.17	28.23	13.29	22.69	12.83	7.63	2	.001	.029

The addition of three proximal relational covariates at Time 1 in a MANCOVA moderated this effect slightly (λ = .963, F = (6, 996) 3.176, p = .004) but the overall impact of consistent service quality remained. In this analysis, a positive peer group had the largest overall effect of the three covariates on the outcome measure, while the quality of the caregiving relationship and a positive school environment had moderate effects (Table 11).

Table 11. Relationship between Time 1 proximal supportive resources and the combined dependent variable at Time 3 (outcomes, resilience and risks)

	df1	*df2*	*f*	*p*	η^2
Positive peer group	3	498	16.49	.000	.090
Quality of caregiving relationships	3	498	6.59	.000	.038
Positive school environment	3	498	6.08	.000	.035

Post hoc (Bonferroni) analyses of the univariate outcomes (adjusted for the three proximal relational resource measures) indicated that young people in the positive service experience group retained the advantages in terms of outcomes and resilience over time that were seen in the MANOVA. However, the quality of the service experience at Time 1 did not appear to have any long term impact on risk levels when the impact of the covariates was taken into account (Table 12).

Table 12. Relationship between service quality and normative wellbeing status, resilience and risk at Time 3

Time 3 Dependent Variables	Service quality	Inconsistent	Consistently negative
Outcomes	Consistently positive	.005	.004
	Inconsistent		1.000
Resilience	Consistently positive	.015	.001
	Inconsistent		.909
Individual Risk	Consistently positive	.050	.116
	Inconsistent		1.000

There are some clear messages from these analyses. Firstly, the issue of risks needs careful attention from professionals. Youth with the highest risks also had the fewest positive coping resources (resilience and relationships in their own networks) around them and service responses appeared to accentuate rather than ameliorate these. Indeed, as the path model demonstrated (see Fig 4), over time, contextual risks also exacerbated individual risks, suggesting increasing complexity as individual and contextual risks interacted and reinforced each other.

As has been noted elsewhere, individual risks often represent an overt manifestation of contextual risks in young people's lives; risk behaviours arise in part as a reaction to, or attempt to manage the risks faced in neighbourhoods, families and at school (Sanders & Munford, 2014; Sherman & Balck, 2015). When unaddressed, contextual risks are likely to manifest themselves in the behavioural risks that compromise youth capacity to do well and into those areas that bring them into contact with the welfare, justice and mental health systems (Berzin, 2010; Sherman & Balck, 2015). Importantly, the data from the path analysis suggests that the potential benefit gained for youth by high quality engagement is jeopardised as the number of professionals involved increases. In this sense, involving numerous professionals in the lives of youth who have high risks may actually constitute an additional risk burden for these youth (Berzin, 2010).

In addition to adopting positive relational practices themselves, professionals must also attend carefully to how other providers engage with youth because, as seen in the second set of analyses, inconsistent service experience had an equally strong relationship with poorer outcomes as did two negative service experiences. One provider working in empowering and respectful ways could not compensate for the negative impact of another provider working in disempowering and disrespectful ways. Furthermore, the analysis suggested that consistently positive service experiences contributed to young people's long-term outcomes above and beyond the specific influence of the interventions they received.

These findings indicate that in addition to building a positive relationship with youth themselves, professionals also need to pay attention to how other practitioners work with their clients because inconsistent service engagement and consistently negative service experiences both compromised positive outcomes.

These findings are encouraging because they suggest when work is premised upon the establishment of strong, positive relationships, multiple service engagement can be a developmental asset for vulnerable young people who face many challenges in navigating a safe pathway through adolescence. Young people who face the greatest challenges will usually be clients of more than one service and the combined efforts of these practitioners need to accumulate in such a way that they close the gap in life chances between the youth who face these substantial challenges and their peers who are able to progress along more normative developmental pathways. Given that 75% of the youth in the current study reported either inconsistent or negative service experiences, it appears that the potential benefits from multiple system engagement do not arise spontaneously. Consistently respectful and empowering interventions do, however, have effects that extend beyond the end of the intervention. This means that attention to the quality of interactions professionals have with vulnerable youth pay dividends beyond the period of service engagement. Thus, a focus on interagency and inter-professional practice that pays attention to the manner in which providers interact with young people, particularly those facing the greatest risks, is an important focus for both policy makers and practitioners.

THE QUALITATIVE DATA

Analysis of the survey data suggested that strong, positive relational practices made a significant contribution to better outcomes for vulnerable youth, augmenting their own resilience resources in the process. It also indicated that there were some challenges for professionals working with these youth in terms of consistently being able to implement strong, positive relational practice, specifically in situations of high individual and contextual risks. There was some indication that addressing contextual risks, via the mechanism of strong relational practice contributed to better outcomes, but that individual risks remained an area of challenge. Given this, the qualitative data collected from interviews over three years with youth and their nominated person most knowledgeable (PMK) provided an opportunity to explore in more detail the types of practices that worked well for youth and those that made it more difficult for them to engage positively with the professionals allocated to them. Analysis of this large data set of over 500 qualitative interviews indicated that three components of practice were important to youth capacity to achieve better outcomes. These components were: orientations of the professional to their practice; orientation of the professional to the young person; and, multi-layered interventions. They are separated out here for discussion purposes (see Figure 5). Of course, in the context of daily practice these components overlap with each other. For instance, orientations to professional practice would be expected to influence the professional orientation taken to the young person, and these in turn will shape the types of actions a professional takes. Thus, Figure 5 shows a continuous process of interaction between the components as well as the components interacting with the capacity of the young person to be an active partner in the intervention.
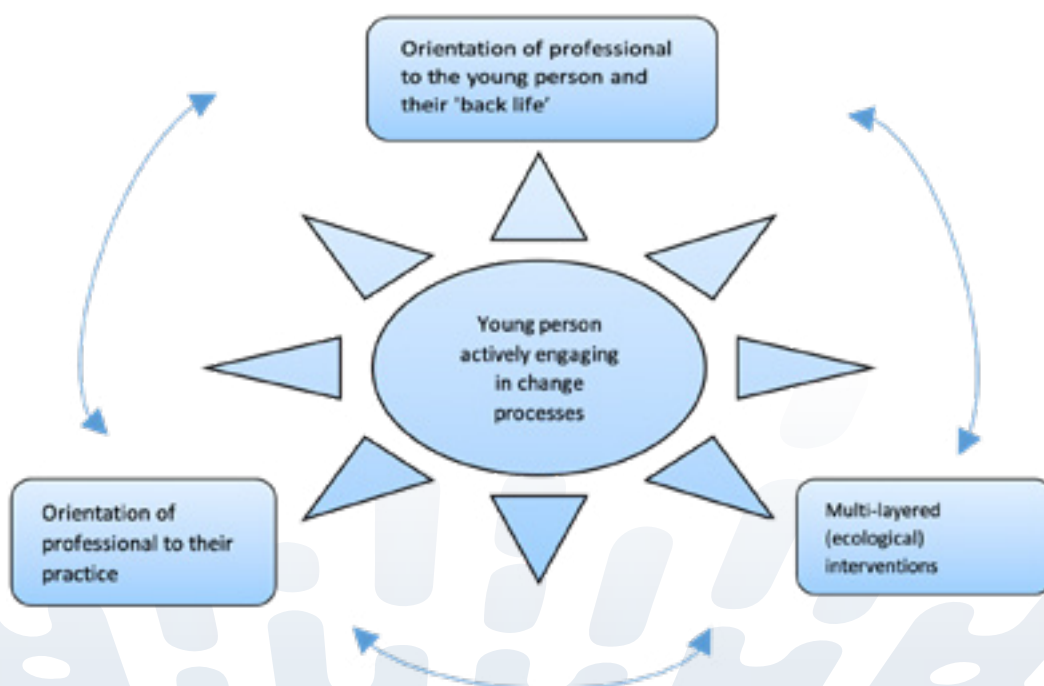

Figure 5. Components of practice

ORIENTATION TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION THAT IS OPEN, INCLUSIVE, AND THAT ENCOURAGES THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Respectful and open communication featured prominently in young people's accounts of the professional practices that made the most difference to their capacity to participate actively in the intervention and work towards desired outcomes. The importance of effective communication cannot be overstated. It calls for professionals to ensure the engagement of young people as partners in the support process. Without this active engagement, interventions simply will not succeed. While the case studies contained numerous examples of active and honest communication between young people and professionals, unfortunately, there were many more examples of poor communication on the part of the professionals. Hanna's story illustrates the impact of poor communication:

Hanna's story

At the time of her birth, Hanna's mother was on a methadone programme and her mother's substance abuse had a major impact on Hanna's physical and neurological development. Hanna was a client of the child protection service from birth, right through to her 17th birthday when she was discharged from statutory care. While she was a client of the statutory child protection service from birth, her first memory of this service was when she was seven years old and two women she did not know turned up at her house and removed her from her mother's care. She was frightened by this experience; it felt like she had been abducted. She did not realise that the things she experienced in her family life were in any way abnormal, as this was the only family life she had ever known. She felt that more effort should have been made to help her understand what was going on, why the drug use and violence that characterised her home life was not acceptable, and what the agency could do to help her and her family:

When they take kids off their parents or off anybody they should sit them down and talk to them and help them understand.

With hindsight, Hanna could see what the social workers were trying to achieve for her, but their sudden appearance in her life and drastic actions without clear explanations, alienated her and initiated a period of huge disruption in her life where she repeatedly ran from foster homes in an attempt to get back to her mother's care. Hanna believed that in order to secure her positive involvement in this intervention, time needed to be taken to explain to her why this action was needed. While the social workers were very familiar with Hanna's life, Hanna had little understanding of who they were and why they were able to have such a powerful impact on her life.

Sarah also talked of the struggles she experienced in adjusting to her removal from her mother's care to a foster care placement. She clearly linked the failure of the succession of foster placements to the demanding and judgemental communication of her social worker. As a young teenager, this approach failed to secure Sarah's active involvement, she resented her social worker's suspicion and her intrusive and domineering manner. She responded by removing herself from all placements and sabotaging any attempts at intervention. Sarah often refused to see her social workers and to attend meetings:

Because she was putting too much things on me, like I wasn't allowed to smoke, I wasn't allowed to drink, I wasn't allowed to go out, I wasn't allowed to hang out with my friends cos of what was happening. I wasn't allowed to come home; I wasn't even allowed to talk to my parents on the phone or through a text or anything. And I couldn't see my nephew or anything, so it was hard.

Had the social worker approached Sarah from a position of respect and genuine concern, providing explanations regarding why things had to happen in particular ways at particular times, Sarah felt she would have been more likely to comply with these directions. However, because her social worker did not take the time to explain decisions and to engage Sarah, Sarah would not allow the social worker to help her.

Unlike Hanna and Sarah who experienced a sudden intrusion of social workers into their lives, Aubrey had tried to secure the help of child protection services because of her mother's violence and abuse towards her. Aubrey had recognised that she needed outside help to resolve her situation. However, despite the initiative she had shown in trying to secure support, the experience was not positive. Her journey through child protection was characterised by many changes of social workers; sometimes initiated by Aubrey, sometimes by the agency. But always, from Aubrey's perspective, these changes occurred because social workers pre-judged her, labelling her a difficult teenager and misunderstanding her situation. This led to frustration and distress for Aubrey that manifested itself in angry outbursts:

I changed it, or they would change it. It's because they didn't, like, when I first went into the system, they said to me 'well you're from a white, middle class family. What are you doing here?' And I really resented that. And I was like 'oh, what do you mean?' Like, just because I'm white, and middle class, doesn't mean there's not shit going on. Like, people are people, no matter where they fit in the society, no matter what colour skin they are.

Like Sarah, Aubrey needed the social worker to work with her from a position of respect and genuine concern, affirming her actions in trying to find support to resolve her challenges. She needed the professionals involved in her life to provide explanations about why and how particular processes worked, and for them to communicate clearly to her where the intervention was heading. Without this, she felt even more alone and that the adults she had asked to help her, were rather working to their own agenda that did not accord with her sense of her own pressing needs. The result was that Aubrey did not comply with their directions and the intervention simply made her life worse. She approached independence on her own. Aubrey spoke of the need for professionals to focus on building positive relationships with the youth in their care by asking open questions that would create opportunities for young people to explain the factors underlying their behaviours. She also believed that professionals did not have sufficient time to spend with young people to explain what was going on and why. While many young people reported that the approach to communication adopted by the professionals in their lives created difficulties for them, some had positive experiences. For instance, Joe's adolescence was punctuated by interventions from both child protection and youth justice services. During this time, he was placed in a number of residential homes located in different towns. He benefited from the support of a social worker who stuck by him throughout these moves. He recalls:

We got along pretty well, able to talk and just be a friend … be someone to bounce ideas off, someone I can go to.

Hara also recalled a positive experience with a social worker and particularly valued persistence in staying in touch and the effort the social worker put in to making sure she understood where Hara was at:

I thank her for being there to talk to and just coz she loves me, she always said she loved me. You're not meant to say that, she said 'I love you, you were like my daughter you know.' Coz I thank her for also trying, coz she tried fuckin how many years, she's still trying, you know, she's still trying to get me to go on the course and do this and that. We communicated, she knows where my head's at now, but she tried and she tried and she tried but she didn't give up.

Open and honest communication made a big difference to the way in which the young people experienced having a professional involved in their lives. It facilitated the development of a strong relationship where both youth and professionals were engaged in a common purpose. Consistency and continuity, discussed next, were also important facets of effective interventions. These facets often provided a counter-point to young people's experiences of relationships with the other adults involved in their lives.

CONTINUITY AND CONSISTENCY IN PRACTICE

Most of the young people reported disrupted family/whānau relationships, precarious living circumstances and major stresses and challenges across their kin networks, all of which created unstable and unpredictable childhoods. A majority had been removed from their parents' care for long or short periods while growing up. This level of disruption and unpredictability made it difficult for them to make sense of their lives and, as Hanna noted above, to understand why social services were involved. It was not unusual for the young people to initially reject professional involvement; it did not make sense to them and, Aubrey's case aside, they could generally not see the point of having more adults interfering. Derek's (PMK) story illustrates this well:

Derek's story

Derek had cared for his granddaughter and her siblings because both parents were in prison. Initially, he greeted the involvement of social work and mental health services with enthusiasm, he felt that finally something good was about to happen. However, service provision was inconsistent; professionals did not keep their word and promised supports did not materialise. Consequently, their involvement did not result in a substantive improvement in his granddaughter's circumstances. Mainstream schools would not re-enrol her as had been repeatedly promised and the intermittent contact of mental health services exacerbated rather than improved her wellbeing because the support promised could not be relied upon, and meetings did not always go well. All of this meant that Derek was left feeling frustrated and disillusioned about the involvement of services in their lives.

A pattern of episodic engagement with the young people that responded to crises rather than the chronic risks the youth faced could be seen in the interview data. This episodic intervention mirrored the disrupted patterns of attachment young people had experienced with adults in their families and whānau. Alex referenced the impact that episodic interventions had upon the chronic problems he faced. Echoing the pattern seen in the survey data of family risks remaining unchanged over time, this pattern of intervention left the challenges he faced substantially unaltered and, in the process, Alex learned that the involvement of professionals in his life left him no better off:

> It's pretty much a waste of time for me doing that [telling people what is going on] coz when it comes to services and that, they just wanna know a little bit then they take you away put you away and then that's it. File closed. Or we'll send you back to your family; send you back to drugs and drunks. And then close the file that's it.

Over three quarters of all the young people in this study reported these types of episodic interventions, where professionals became involved in their lives for a short period of time (typically 3–6 months), the file was closed and then a short time later when issues again became acute (usually within 6 months) a new referral was made and work began again. This pattern was especially common across mental health and child protection services. In many instances, re-referrals did not draw on information and plans established in previous work, leaving the young person having to tell their story all over again. As each new referral was made their confidence that their needs would be met diminished.

This pattern of episodic intervention in situations of chronic need was common across the study and was also seen in the survey data where the higher youth risks the more services became involved in their lives, but this involvement did not consistently lead to better outcomes. However, some young people did report interventions that made a major difference to them. These case studies illustrate how consistency and continuity in service responses created the opportunity for young people to make sense of their experiences and to build a new set of expectations about their futures (Case, 2006; Munford & Sanders, 2015b). Hine's story illustrates the importance of these practices:

Hine's story

Hine was raised by her grandfather from birth until her grandfather's death when she was 10 years old. Child welfare services had been involved throughout this time and following her grandfather's death, the service allowed her original social worker to stay involved as Hine moved towns to a series of foster care placements. This consistent involvement, through some deeply troubling times as Hine adjusted to life without her grandfather who had been her lifeline, made a major difference to Hine. The continuity was of major importance to Hine as all her family members had abandoned her as a baby, leaving her with no strong kin relationships to call on as she faced life without her Koro (grandfather). She described her social worker as her 'government mummy':

> My social worker. I love her so much she's just pure awesomeness … I can't really explain it. She's always been there, she's like a real mummy. She's my government mummy. She's really cool. I am still in contact with her even though I am not with [service] any more.

For Hine, the key characteristic of this helping relationship was that the social worker who first took her into care remained a consistent presence in her life. Her 'government mummy' therefore, became an enduring presence that persisted beyond her discharge from state care at the age of 17. Her social worker continued to be available at the end of a phone as Hine went about trying to create a secure life for herself. Like Hine, Joseph had the same social worker throughout his teen years and so the social worker became the enduring presence in his life. This social worker was the only person who carried his story and became the family that did not go away (Warren-Adamson & Lightburn, 2004, 220). Joseph's story highlights that consistency and continuity, like communication, takes time and commitment and that organisational practices need to make it possible for social workers to be able to respond positively to young people's attempts to make contact with them:

Joseph's story

Joseph's social worker had built a strong relationship with him and this helped him to recognise the value that could be gained from having services in his life. His social worker provided an anchor for him as he travelled through a turbulent adolescence with little familial support. Importantly, his social worker supported him to take an active part in the relationship, encouraging him to initiate contact and responding positively to his views on decisions that needed to be made; however, continuity and consistency were still issues for Joseph:

> Well I'd call them every day and no one picked up. And I do need them and I call and you know? And probably when I do contact them, it's like, a month later, and it's like maybe ten seconds hello, goodbye.

The young people had limited support networks; enduring and unconditional emotional support was often missing from their lives. Despite the many challenges and constraints they faced on a daily basis, they nonetheless retained a desire to experience an 'ordinary life' (Featherstone, White & Morris, 2014) and so would seek out people who might support them, whoever these people might be and regardless of the risks that such relationships might raise for them. Thus, when able to provide consistency and stability, significant adults, such as foster parents, became an enduring presence (Munford & Sanders, 2016b). They could make the difference between a life that spiralled out of control and one that featured careful, sometimes faltering steps forward. It was critical that these key adults were encouraged to continue to support the youth even when they made mistakes and poor decisions. Having at least one trusted adult made a substantive difference in young people's lives; they provided safety, emotional anchoring, and helped the young people to make sense of their worlds in ways that increased the chances of positive outcomes.

Joanna and Siena both talked about having confidence that their social workers "*had [their] back[s]*" and would "*stand by*" them through difficult times. While these social workers also dispensed what the young women described as "*tough love*", this did not undermine the sense of security they gained from the enduring presence their social workers had in their lives. They knew the social workers would support them, even when they made mistakes, and this provided continuity in their lives. This consistent support meant a lot to both young women and, critically, both noted that this enabled them to begin to trust other adults. Other youth also commented on this: *Yeah I felt she was there 24/7, so you feel you are never by yourself, and you are never isolated. [Carmela]*

Like Joseph, Simon had a social worker who continued to support him even when he moved into another area. Having this relationship endure through the many moves that are a common feature of the lives of vulnerable youth, made a difference for Simon and he commented upon his social worker's relentless commitment to finding solutions that were meaningful and relevant to him. Anika described consistency as a commitment her social worker made to her as a person:

> You just have to be there for the person, like the extra mile like how [my social worker] said 'if you don't txt me I'll find you' and she did find me, took me to [a café] … And she just talked to me and said 'it's got to stop' [drug use] but she talked to me on my level when she was talking to me, she wasn't talking to me as this person that had to do their job, I was real to her, she knew how it was for me, that helped.

Anika's social worker had made sure she knew Anika's history and the things that mattered to her. The social worker put effort into building an accurate picture of Anika's life and how these wider experiences influenced the mental health issues she faced.

Looking at examples from the case studies relating to consistency and continuity, what is clear is that, with the exception of keeping in touch with a youth when they moved out of the district or when they were discharged, none of the actions of these professionals are in any way remarkable or exceptional. Indeed, they fit well within everyday practice and their often-mundane nature was frequently what made them important to the young person.

The second set of orientations that the qualitative data indicated played an important role in the achievement of good outcomes were the orientation professionals took to the young person, and the 'back life' that they explained influenced their capacity to do well. In particular and building on the preceding discussion, this orientation had three key aspects: culture and context, resistance, and misrecognition/shame/recognition. Attention now turns to these matters.

ORIENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL TO THE YOUNG PERSON AND THEIR 'BACK LIFE'

CULTURE AND CONTEXT

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, practice that is culturally embedded and responsive is of the greatest priority, and recent legislative changes in the child welfare and youth justice areas reinforce the critical importance of culturally anchored practice as well as practice that specifically addresses accumulated disadvantages experienced, particularly by Māori youth and whānau. The Children, Young Persons' and their Families Act (1989) specifically incorporated concepts of traditional Māori kinship structures and placed the extended family at the centre of decision-making (Connolly, 2009). The importance of culturally anchored practice that is consistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi was given increased emphasis in the recent legislative reform of the 1989 Act. Amendments to that legislation[5] now place specific responsibilities upon the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki (the state child protection and youth justice agency) to ensure that this agency delivers programmes and builds relationships with Māori that are consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi. More generally, social sector practice in Aotearoa New Zealand places a high priority on culturally sensitive practice (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012) and this can be seen in actions such as allocating social workers from the same iwi or cultural group as the young person, as well as care to ensure that practitioners seek guidance from clients about proper cultural practices. Achieving culturally responsive practice requires an orientation that places families and young people at the centre of decision-making and supports social workers to take the time to understand cultural contexts and practices and to draw upon these in interventions (Ruch et al., 2010). Maree's story reflects the importance of culturally embedded practice:

Maree's story

Maree was particularly appreciative of the emphasis on service provision that responded to her culture. She valued being allocated to a social worker who was from her own iwi and explained that this connection gave her confidence that her social worker would understand how things were for her. As a result she was more receptive to suggestions her social worker made regarding her living circumstances and she surprised herself by accepting a residential placement and actively participating in all the programmes offered while in the facility. She even accepted the restrictions on her freedom that the residential programme imposed, something she had strenuously rejected in the past. She felt deeply understood by her social worker; she didn't have to explain everything in great detail because her social worker understood her. This feeling of being deeply understood by her social worker because of the iwi affiliation was a powerful factor in the success of the intervention for Maree. In making changes she felt that she was moving closer to her cultural roots and this helped her to make difficult decisions and choices.

When professionals took the time to understand the young person's cultural beliefs and values and their wider circumstances, young people were more likely to feel that they could trust their worker and this trust then provided a stable base for the intervention:

Hone's story

Hone, talked about the value he gained from an intervention with a child protection social worker because this professional encouraged him to reconnect with his iwi. The social worker went to considerable effort to make connections with people in his iwi and to prepare them for his initial contact. This preparation meant that first contact was a positive experience for Hone. While reconnecting with his iwi on its own did not resolve all the challenges Hone faced, the social worker's recognition that reconnecting to his iwi was profoundly important to him, and his growing sense of who he was and where he belonged in the world, enabled him to begin to trust adults. This then paved the way for his growth and development. Understanding the importance of cultural connections for Hone was the key first step to creating the opportunities for change.

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[5] Oranga Tamariki Act 2017, section 7AA

While of great significance, culture is not the only contextual factor to be taken into account when professionals intervene in young people's lives. The risks the young people faced at home and in their neighbourhoods often made it impossible for them to sustain gains made during interventions. In their interviews, the young people often referred positively to professionals who took the time to understand what Bailey described as her "*back life*". For support to be meaningful it needed to take account of the impact young people's wider life circumstances had upon their behaviours and what it was possible for them to achieve. As Alex (above) explained, before discharging him from services, professionals needed to understand that they were sending him back to "*drugs and drunks*" with the result that any chance at positive change would evaporate for him. He knew this, and he could not understand why the professionals involved in his life did not understand it too and, importantly, do something about it.

Hayley explained that her mental health social worker did not understand her 'back life' with the result that Hayley would not listen to him or try to implement his suggested strategies. She explained that she needed her worker to be: *"Someone that's been in my position before, someone that understands what it is like to be in my situation, who knows what is likely to work and what is not"*. Aubrey also explained why it was so important that professionals understood young people's back lives:

> *Yeah, that's their life. That's what they've grown up with. They don't know any different, and child protection workers don't look at it like that. They see it as, 'oh you should know different, just because your family doesn't, you should'. And it's like 'um, no'. Like you grow up, like the situation would come up, and you learn how to deal with it from your family. And I think they just need to look at the bigger picture and go 'Ok, well that offending's history', but kind of trying to understand why children keep offending. Like actually for most of the assault ones, there's something going on. Why don't they ask 'what's going on behind it?' They just never take the time to sit down and go well, 'why did you punch me in the face?' 'Why would you start the fight?' 'What were they doing to you that made you so angry?'*

Aubrey highlights the need for professionals to not only listen, but also to ask searching questions so that they learn how young people's circumstances influence their behaviour. Aubrey suggests that young people's behaviour tells a story that is deeper and more important than its surface appearance. Responding only to concerning behaviours, such as, for instance, absconding, without attempting to learn what it is that young people are running away from, or what they may be running towards, leads to misdirected interventions. When social workers demonstrated understanding and awareness of the ways that contexts shaped behaviours, young people were open to the involvement of professionals in their lives.

RESISTANCE

As already noted, the young people in the current study lived in challenging circumstances, where risk and exposure to significant harm were part of everyday life (Munford & Sanders, 2017a). To engage effectively with these youth, professionals needed to understand that these circumstances meant that building the young person's trust would take time during which it might feel like no progress was being made. It was important that practitioners understood that youth contexts might make them reluctant or resistant to professional involvement in their lives. Indeed, resistance might well be a coping strategy developed to help them stay safe and to 'test' relationships with others, particularly with professionals. Understanding that resistance might underpin young people's observed behaviours and thus shape interactions with professionals is thus an important facet of a professional orientation to youth.

The nature of young people's resistance

Throughout the interviews, young people talked about their responses to professional involvement in their lives. Narratives describing resistance were common. They appeared as behaviours ranging from low level responses, such as not communicating or participating, withdrawal, missing appointments, not disclosing information and sharing feelings, to more sustained resistance seen when they talked about being "*staunch*", challenging authority, absconding, angry outbursts, fighting, offending, self-harm, substance abuse, and gang membership:

> **Mariana and Stephen's stories**
> Mariana's story illustrates the low-level resistance responses. She had been let down by many adults and the only people she trusted were her grandparents. She was a client of the statutory care and protection agency from birth, and began offending when she was 11 years old. Keeping quiet and not letting people get close to her was her way to keep safe: "*… don't like them knowing … had people nosing around my whole life*". Mariana said despite services "*nosing around*" interventions had not always been helpful and she had concluded that she wanted to be left alone to sort out her challenges herself. Mariana explained that resistance was often a deliberate coping strategy she used to push adults away in order to cope on her own. Equally, however, for other youth it was an unconscious response learned over time to self-protect.
>
> Stephen explained that his drug and alcohol abuse helped him deal with the violence in his family. Despite enjoying learning, his resistance to school rules and routines led to his expulsion and with that, education as a pathway to a better future was closed for him. He had a period in a compulsory residential treatment programme for substance abuse but continued to struggle to build trust-based relationships with adults.

Resistance could also change depending on who was involved, and whether or not a professional displayed a willingness to support the young person to work through their resistance and to learn new ways of responding to adults. Some, like Joe, ran away from challenging home environments and lived on the streets with their friends: "*You learn from them (friends) like you go out on the streets … but the street's not a home*". Joe went on to say that on the streets there was no-one "*to love you*"; something he was seeking but not finding. However, his past experiences of being let down made it difficult for him to change his responses to professionals from resistance to openness.

Low-level and intermittent resistance often grew over time to become the predominant response to dealing with the daily challenges youth confronted. It then shaped responses to any attempt by an adult, professional or otherwise, to intervene in their lives. Resistance generated responses from practitioners who typically found it difficult to positively deal with and engage with these young people.

Understanding the causes of resistance

Some practitioners did respond positively to resistance and focused on providing opportunities for the young person to make a positive connection with them, while others struggled to work with youth and to understand and harness this resistance. School was a common site of resistance. Most youth had stopped attending school at or prior to the legal leaving age of 15 years:

> #### Emma's story
> Emma described herself as living on the margins. She left school at 15 because she felt so different to her peers who had "*stable families*". She struggled to cope with the tensions at home and the lack of understanding at school of her hard home life. When she left school, she also left home and managed on her own. The self-reliance she needed to develop to live on the streets at 15 years manifested as resistance when professionals tried to engage with her. She was unaccustomed to having help and did not know how to respond.

Anthony and Tai also struggled at school. They found teachers to be judgemental and unwilling to take account of the impact their learning issues and difficult home circumstances had on their academic performance. It all felt impossible at school and they responded with angry outbursts. Reon also dealt with his feelings of exclusion by fighting and at a young age became known as a *"good fighter"*. He said he never fitted in at school and had difficulty learning so he took on a tough demeanour that masked his difficulties. His fighting escalated and he was expelled. Given their challenging circumstances, if teachers and other school personnel did not take the time to understand their situations, school remained a difficult environment.

School thus became a common site for resistance that manifested in a number of ways: withdrawal from activities, acting out, or simply not attending.

Regarding school, Karin said: "*It got too much trying to sort it all, so I used to walk in the front gate and walk out the back gate*". While her teachers at primary school had provided meaningful support, the transition to high school was not well managed and she felt judged and labelled. Leia had a similar experience and spoke of teachers picking on her for not wearing the correct uniform and challenging her attitude. In this way, the school environment created fertile ground for Leia's resistance. Like many of the young people in the study, she felt the teachers did not take the time to know what was going on for her at home. Lack of compassion and understanding of her circumstances made school a hostile and unwelcoming place.

The interviews also contained examples of resistance young people had to other professional encounters. In these cases they explained that professionals: *"didn't listen"*, *"seemed too busy"*, *"didn't believe me"*, *"pushed me away"*, *"broke their promises"*, *"had no patience with us"*. Justin talked about his experiences as a young adolescent in the youth justice system. He said that his social worker did not take the time to understand that his angry behaviour was embedded in pain and confusion as a result of violence and substance abuse in his family; rather his social worker responded to his angry outbursts as if they were irrational acts of destruction.

On the other hand, young people reported positive encounters with professionals who saw beyond the resistance. Later in his interview Justin, for instance, explained that things started to change for him after release from the youth justice facility, when he attended an alternative education programme and met a tutor who "*hung in*" with him and helped him understand why he felt so angry all of the time. He said: "*he was harsh but fair … he didn't beat around the bush, he listened to what I said*".

Jema and Mariana, had repeatedly run from care placements. They explained that the need to resist reduced when they were allocated to social workers who listened respectfully to them. In listening, the social workers provided opportunities for them to reflect on why they were running away and these insights helped them to stay longer in placements; the first steps on the way to bigger changes. The net result of this for both young women was that they wanted to keep seeing the worker who understood the roots of their resistance; they became open to working on positive solutions to their care needs that would keep them safe.

The common factor in all the cases young people recounted of successful involvement of professionals in their lives was practitioner recognition that resistance served an important function and held significant meaning for the young person. This insight then facilitated the development of a trusting bond because the young person knew the professional understood the reality of their life. From there, resistance became available as a resource for change. Working with resistance is not straightforward, however, it calls for courageous practice. Central to effectively harnessing resistance is support for practitioners to contain the anxieties of the young person and the risks that resistance poses for the young person, the practitioner and the organisation.

Harnessing resistance in interventions

Young people noticed when practitioners worked positively with their resistance. For instance, Jema's worker helped her understand why she ran from placements. To start with, she took the time to find out about the things Jema liked to do and encouraged these things, such as her love of reading. Then she responded carefully to Jema's resistance by avoiding punitive and judgemental responses, and instead asked Jema for more information to help her understand. Finally she supported Jema to use her resistance in positive ways, supporting her to question decisions made at school and by other professionals and recognising resistance as a sign of strength. Brittany appreciated her worker not *"freaking out"* about her self-harm, which several practitioners had done previously. Her mental health social worker instead encouraged her to find creative ways of understanding this behaviour, such as encouraging her to write her feelings in a journal and then talking about them together. Anna's youth justice social worker recognised that fear and anxiety lay beneath her repeated refusal to even talk about mental health support. By working on these underlying emotions, she was gradually able to build the courage to attend a psychological assessment. For others, a counsellor was able to recognise and hold the young person's grief and then understand that grief was fuelling angry and violent outbursts.

Many counsellors helped youth to get beneath their anger and to face their grief safely by starting with the issues that most pressed upon the young person and encouraging them to start to talk. Chelsea found that she was: "*happy that I'm talking … that I am letting it go*". Chelsea deeply appreciated having the recognition from a professional that her behaviour was a reasonable response to the violence and drug abuse in her family. In a similar way, during a period in custody Saul was supported to talk about and come to understand the source of his anger. The counsellor endorsed many of Saul's responses such as when he *"held in"* his feelings rather than acting with violence, and "*walking away*" and disengaging. While these responses created issues for Saul, his counsellor helped him to realise that he was trying to cope in a non-

violent way with threats to his safety. He appreciated a professional recognising that he was trying to respond in positive ways. These acknowledgements rather than criticisms of his coping strategies were transformational for Saul. Seeing his actions through his counsellor's eyes as positive opened him up to big changes. In seeing resistance as a positive strategy his counsellor was better able to support Saul and to help him learn how to use his skills and strengths in positive ways and to begin a constructive journey of change.

Young people also reported that they valued professionals seeking advice from others on how to understand their behaviour. For example, Mariana's residential social worker involved her grandparents in decisions. Mariana trusted her grandparents and they knew a lot about her background, such as why she was angry, and pushed people away. It was important to Mariana that the social worker recognised that there were supportive people in her whānau and that they were encouraged to be part of the processes of healing and moving forward. In the past her whānau had only been seen as the cause of her problems and a source of trouble. Less often, although not less valuable, were the situations where teachers actually listened to social workers' explanations of the background circumstances of young people and adopted their suggestions about how to respond more positively to the young people when their behaviours became a concern. In this way resistance could be used to create opportunities for meaningful engagement. In this process, professionals became useful resources, whether they were teachers or social service workers.

In the current study, two different professional responses to resistance were observed. Either practitioners sought to suppress resistance or they sought to understand and then use it as positive momentum for change. Young people interpreted the first set of responses as a lack of understanding of the reality of their experiences. These responses tended to provoke more resistance. For instance, Karin felt judged at high school and reported that teachers did not appreciate the delicate balance of safety she created for herself. Her response was to remove herself from school. In such situations, interventions were experienced as unhelpful intrusions in young people's carefully structured lives. When young people were unable to trust practitioners because 'previous relationships have been unhelpful or even humiliating', opportunities to create pathways to positive outcomes were missed (Barker & Thomson 2015, 142).

RECOGNITION, MISRECOGNITION AND SHAME

Responding positively to resistance calls for recognition of the way that circumstances shape behaviours (Honneth, 1995). When practitioners do not recognise the cause of resistance or understand that challenging youth behaviours arise within a context, misrecognition occurs. Misrecognition featured prominently in the young people's accounts; this created feelings of anger and shame that then distorted their responses to the approaches professionals made to them. Misrecognition was experienced as a lack of acknowledgement of the young person's lived reality and this undermined any potential value from professional support. For example, if a professional defined a young person's refusal to participate as non-compliance rather than as self-protection, then the resultant intervention was ineffective.

Young people also reported feelings of shame when professionals were unable to positively engage with them. Feelings of unworthiness, disrespect, having issues discounted, challenges ignored and of being humiliated and excluded, were common. A particularly pernicious impact of shame and misrecognition was that the young person assumed full responsibility for their circumstances when in reality, adults both within their own networks and within the professional community had failed them. Their response to shame took two forms: internalising behaviour such as withdrawal and self-harm, and externalising as seen above in the discussion of resistance:

Jerry's feelings of shame were also expressed in internalising ways. He had entered the care system as a teenager after a challenging childhood. His difficult relationships with his mother and siblings left him struggling at school, and he was excluded. Jerry only had intermittent contact with his father and so overall, there were no adults he could rely upon. Jerry said that he coped by ignoring issues and when things got tough he "*just walked away*". Although he had support from a foster parent over a sustained period, he said he had difficulty "*making things right*". He shared these feelings across the three interviews and in the third interview, he had left the care system and felt he was "*back to rock bottom again*". Anger and rage were also common reactions to feelings of shame:

Kera's story

Kera's story typifies the internalising type of response. She had learned to manage her feelings by withdrawing, keeping quiet, and running from care placements when her feelings became overwhelming. She had been in the care system from an early age and, at the time of the first research interview, had been in more than ten care placements. While she had periods living with her family, these were always short-lived. She said that her father wanted her at home but her mother struggled with addiction issues and was unable to care for her. At her first interview, Kera spoke quietly and kept her head down; she was used to being judged and expected the same response from the researcher who interviewed her. However, she smiled when she talked about how she enjoyed reading. She then quietly spoke of her distress that she had not been able to complete high school because of the number of foster placements she had experienced. At the second interview, she had left the care system and was trying to complete a pre-employment course. She did not have stable accommodation and by the third interview, she was using drugs and working as a sex worker. Kera's PMK, Ria (a foster carer), said that Kera used drugs to manage her feelings of rejection by her mother, betrayal by her father who Kera felt had chosen her mother over her. Kera felt abandoned by the adults in her life. Ria was one of the few people that Kera trusted and she would seek out Ria when she was in crisis. Ria said that Kera coped by dissociating herself from the "*bad things*" that happened to her. When she opened up, Kera talked about being judged, feeling ashamed about being in care and not being loved by her mother, she felt this was all her fault. In her third interview, she stated that history kept repeating:

> *some dramas happened there and so I ended up leaving there*

and:

> *I've pretty much sort of gone like in a full circle*

and she blamed herself for the things that had happened to her:

> *I've made so many stuffed up decisions and stupid mistakes that, like trusted the wrong people, had the wrong advice I guess. But I can't blame it, like, all on other people. Like a lot of it was to do with me.*

Many young people recounted engagements with professionals that featured misrecognition, disrespect and humiliation, all of which provoked feelings of shame. Feelings of shame and not being understood got in the way of constructive relationships with professionals and accordingly, to be effective in their practice, professionals needed to recognise the young person's situation and create a safe space for the young person to begin to imagine a different type of future.

There were examples of relationships with practitioners based on respect, understanding, reciprocity and mutuality. In these cases, young people remained engaged with services and talked of the positive benefits they gained from professional involvement in their lives. In these cases, the professionals providing them with care, recognised the reality of the challenges they faced and from there steps on the way to change could be taken. Positive recognition was critical.

Young people's descriptions of practices that enabled them to move beyond shame were analysed using Honneth's intersubjective theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995). This theory has three dimensions: love and care; respect; and, being valued. The dimensions intersect and are realised when young people are able to build trust-based relationships with positive adults and peers. Along with the understanding of resistance as a positive resource, this theory enables professionals to stand next to the young people they support and see the world through a lens of compassionate professionalism and humility, recognising that if they were in the young person's situation, they might well make the same choices. The intersubjective theory of recognition provides a useful way of analysing young people's narratives about the professional practices that made the most difference to them.

Love and care

Emotional wellbeing is fundamental to human health and to the capacity to engage in healthy relationships. Love and care from others are the mechanisms by which emotional wellbeing is achieved and a sense of belonging and self-worth is established. This begins in infancy with strong attachment to key caregiving figures. Frost (2016) suggests that being loved and cared for is linked to the other forms of recognition; respect and being valued. This fundamental experience was frequently missing from the lives of the young people in the research. Indeed, they often talked of knowing that they were not loved, that no-one cared for or about them. Abandonment was common. There were relatively few stories of caring, or of adults who demonstrated enduring commitment to the young person, but there were some examples. Consistent love and care could be seen in some of the PMK interviews. For instance, Wendy (mother, PMK) explained:

> *Just really hanging in there with her, I mean that's the good thing, when we get time together, without interruption.*

"*Hanging in*" was a very tangible manifestation of love and care. Foster parents were one group of PMK who consistently demonstrated love and care. They did this by accepting young people into their families and providing opportunities to experience everyday, ordinary activities as well as cultural and recreational experiences. In these ways foster parents demonstrated love and care. Other examples of love and care were seen when someone stood by the young person, even when they kept getting into trouble. For instance, Jermaine's grandmother kept going to court to support him and visited him when he was in prison, bringing supplies to help him and to retain his sense of connection to home. Young people recounted that finding someone who gave them love and care could be a critical turning point for them. As well as caring for them, these significant others accorded young people respect, the second aspect of Honneth's theory.

Respect

Respect creates a sense of belonging and self-worth. The young people experienced respect when professionals made sure that they involved the youth in decision making and encouraged them to participate in ordinary acts of citizenship and in the life of their communities. Stefan described his experience in the justice system and the support he received from a judge who took the time to listen to him and understand his needs: "*he made things happen*". This was a critical moment for Stefan, the judge had demonstrated genuine respect for Stefan by understanding the circumstances that lay behind his offending. This gave him hope that some adults could be trusted and that intervention could lead to positive change. Ross described an education support worker who demonstrated respect for him and, as a result, school became a safer place to be.

School exclusion was a common experience for the young people in this study so it was a highly significant and positive turning point for Ross when a staff member took the time to understand his needs and the context of his behaviour. Respect also involved being treated fairly. Hala described a worker who was helpful, kind and was not "*detrimental*" to young people. As was often the case in the research, the demonstrations of respect by professionals were not complicated, more often they were simple acts of human kindness and common decency.

Being valued

The best examples of professional practice with young people in the study involved clear demonstrations that the worker valued the young person, held them in positive regard and saw beneath all the labels and all the chaos experienced by this inherently valuable person. Richi described feeling valued in a youth justice facility that provided a cultural programme which nurtured his growing sense of connection to his Māori heritage. Marcea also experienced being valued in a group home where she enjoyed the regular routines and activities, such as cooking and attending school; these daily activities made her feel good about herself. The valuing for her resided in being able to do 'normal' things and being encouraged to contribute. Young people also felt valued when professionals acknowledged their coping capacities and strengths. In managing their challenging circumstances, young people had learned important skills and when professionals recognised this, they ascribed value to the young person. Valuing young people's capacities provides a foundation for them to participate in social and community life; they have a value therefore they have something to contribute. Being valued grows out of trusting relationships based on mutuality and reciprocal recognition, without these elements value can be seen as false and disrespectful (Frost, 2016; Paulsen & Thomas, 2018). When professionals recognised young people's skills, talents and knowledge, they enhanced their self-esteem by providing opportunities for them to make a meaningful contribution to the support process.

Honneth's (1995) theory of intersubjective recognition is helpful in orienting practitioners to the young people they work with. It underscores the everyday, humble and caring ways in which practitioners can orient themselves to this work. It has a good fit with the young people's accounts of the practitioners who helped them create positive change and to realise a positive sense of self. Alongside this, the data also highlighted a number of specific actions practitioners took that made a difference for the young people and these are discussed next.

MULTI-LAYERED (ECOLOGICAL) INTERVENTIONS

The preceding two sections drew on the qualitative data and identified the professional orientations that are linked to better engagement by youth and to better outcomes. This final section considers some of the specific intervention actions and tasks that youth and their PMKs reported made a difference to their capacity to make and sustain change. It illustrates the value of ecological interventions; practices that respond on multiple levels to young people. That these actions worked well was in part attributable to their delivery from within the two orientations outlined above. Overall, when professionals engaged with youth and their social context, that is, taking account of their "*back life*", as Bailey described, and responding on a wide front to the needs the young people had, youth reported greater satisfaction with the intervention, were more likely to remain engaged and to achieve better outcomes.

As has already been described, the young people had complex lives involving long-term exposure to chronic adversity across multiple domains. Their needs spanned emotional, developmental, relational and practical domains and as a result ecological interventions worked well because they addressed this span of need. Youth appreciated receiving emotional support and gaining insight into what was happening for them, but equally important was learning practical coping strategies and receiving assistance with basic daily needs such as food and shelter. Some said that they got "*sick of having to talk*" all the time and wanted professionals to help them sort out the big and sometimes frightening practical challenges they faced, like not having a safe place to sleep. It was important that professionals recognised the signals youth gave; that is, when they did not wish to explore their emotions, and those times when they were open to such sensitive discussions. Excerpts from interviews below elaborate upon this mix of practical and emotional support:

Being depressed and angry, going to a counsellor helped. So I can't really remember when it started and what it was like before but it was just normal to me. To be sad and angry, oh I was an angry little girl, I hated, I hated the world. My social worker understood me and taught me lots of useful stuff.

I used to cut my wrists, when I talked to my social worker I worked out that it was my way to control things. If things don't go my way it's my way of getting everyone to shut up. And it just puts me in control. Like everyone will listen. It was something I could do to calm me down. I got to understand it.

She never judged me, I was scared, didn't know why I got angry. She just kept seeing me and talking to me about it and I got to understand what was going on. She talked to me heaps, what I could do like remove myself from situations, stuff like that.

I just got to the point where I was sick of talking, sick of always having to explain what was going on in my head. I just didn't want to talk anymore. My counsellor was cool with that, I think he got it, that there was just nothing more to say. He said, "so where are you sleeping tonight?" I realised that for all the counselling I had had, no-one had asked me that and then we started to talk about taking care of myself, you know, my body, where I slept, what I ate and stuff. He got me into a women's hostel, helped me find a doctor who could sort out my periods.

Young people and their PMKs appreciated practitioners who assisted them with obtaining resources. This could be as simple as providing transport to meetings and extended to facilitating access to networks that could provide access to other resources such as learning support. Many lacked the whānau/family support and the safety nets that other young people draw on as they negotiate the movement into adult roles (Hardgrove et al., 2015). Successful practice was characterised by the provision of practical resources, such as support with writing job applications, preparation for interviews and being a sounding board for young people as they navigated the exigencies of the labour market.

Advocacy was a clear and critical way in which professionals could demonstrate that they had heard the young person, understood their situation and appreciated why they acted in the ways they did. Advocacy unlocked resources and opportunities for young people that could make a very tangible difference to them. In advocating, practitioners demonstrated that they understood the young person's needs and circumstances and that they were willing to fight alongside them for resources and supports. Advocacy is thus a powerful technique that builds trust. Examples of advocacy included directly arguing on the young person's behalf for services and appropriate responses, assisting youth to secure financial support from government agencies and supporting them to assert their right to fair employment contracts. Through advocacy, professionals clearly demonstrated that they were the 'different sort of adult'; the one who would back up the young person and support them to access the resources they needed to begin to thrive. Through advocacy, professionals also demonstrated that they understood the young person's 'back life'. Two of the young people described how they experienced the advocacy of their social workers:

First I went to the GP and then to CAFS (mental health service) then she (social worker) got me to go to counselling, she took me there. I wouldn't have gone otherwise. She was always there when I needed someone to talk to and she helped me understand what was going on for me.

I saw them every week and they sometimes would come to my meetings with me (with other mental health professionals), they would stand up for me and have a talk and yeah that helped me.

Another, perhaps less obvious, facet of advocacy was seen in the work professionals did with young people's families/whānau. The relationship between youth and their families/whānau was often complex, could feature tension, conflict, abuse and neglect, but despite this, families/whānau also constituted an important source of support for the young person, if their positive involvement could be secured. Family/whānau often also had their own issues and challenges that could get in the way of seeing the young person and their needs clearly. Sometimes they were overwhelmed by the challenges confronting the youth. When professionals worked constructively with whānau/family so that they were able to focus upon and support their young person, these people became powerful resources. Advocacy here involved assisting family/whānau to come to terms with the need for intervention and to understand the nature of the young person's issues and needs.

This type of advocacy could also involve supporting the family/whānau to learn positive ways of managing the conflicting tensions of relief, on the one hand, that help might be available, and on the other of needing to come to terms with the reality of the serious needs their child had. Young people spoke with gratitude of the workers who advocated for them to their family/whānau so that the family/whānau could accept the implications of their challenges and become willing to receive support. The following quote from a young person who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia is representative of this advocacy by social workers:

It was during this time that the social worker talked to my family to stop them freaking out and that helped me big time, stopped them going off because he (social worker) was able to talk to them, make it easier for me.

Significant adults such as caregivers, support workers, and teachers, were identified by young people as advocates who argued for services and relevant and meaningful supports. For instance, many professionals advocated strongly for youth to be able to return to school. As schools were often reluctant to welcome youth back, collaboration across services and systems was important here. Social workers, in particular, played a key role in working hard with other professionals to identify how a return to school could be safely managed for all parties. Partnerships between agencies, such as education and mental health services, enabled positive transitions between services and a consistent approach to building respectful support for young people.

A key advocacy skill in this regard, was the building of ongoing relationships across systems, so that when youth needed more than one professional to make decisions, these relationships were already in place. For example, Hemi's support worker encouraged others in his network to support his transition to a new learning environment and she also assisted Hemi to develop the skills and knowledge he needed to advocate on his own behalf. Over time, his social worker had built an extensive network among the professionals in her community, and she drew on these relationships as she advocated for resources from across the service spectrum for Hemi.

There are arguments that youth should not be placed in residential facilities and should rather be cared for in the community. Certainly, youth did not always enter these programmes of their own volition, and frequently resisted referrals. However, without exception, these youth identified that the time spent in residential programmes represented the most settled periods of their lives and the place at which they felt they made the most progress. Youth particularly valued the following elements of residential care: a safe environment; protection from harmful influences; structure and routine; regular food and a warm, dry place to sleep; a chance to learn how to manage their issues; specific targeted interventions; and the space to think differently about the future. These aspects are picked up by two youth below:

I had like structure and like rules and they helped me stick to my goals and deal with my anger.

I did not want to go to that place, and I ran from the foster family the day before I was supposed to go. But once they found me and took me there it was different. I still didn't like being locked up, but after a while I got clean (withdrew from drugs), I did my schooling there, they found out that I needed glasses, they sorted my eczema, the doctor there was really nice, she got me the jab too (contraceptive injection) and when I came out I had some of my level 1s (school qualification). I wouldn't have got that on the outside.

The young people confronted huge challenges that were complex and included dealing with the effects of attachment and abandonment issues, chronic abuse and neglect, health problems, challenges fitting into school, as well as addressing the consequences of living in harmful environments from a young age.

While in residential placements they were able to take time out from all of these issues and focus on themselves, and in the best cases, they had access to positive adults who would support them to work out how to move forward. The combination of structured daily routines and therapeutic programmes afforded young people opportunities to engage in sustained work on deep and profound issues while the distractions of daily life were kept away. As a result, they left these programmes in a stronger position and often with confidence that they could move forward.

The problem with residential placement was that if, as was typically the case, no work had been done with their families/whanau, young people returned to all the issues that led to the need for the placement in the first place; any gains made in residence were lost. Importantly, confidence that adults would provide meaningful pathways to sustainable solutions was also lost when youth returned home to unchanged situations.

However, there were instances of careful planning so that young people's transitions back into the community were well supported. Zac's story provides a clear example of the provision of a seamless process of referral into a residential programme, community of origin support while on the programme, followed by ongoing support post discharge:

Zac's story

Zac had been referred into a 12-month substance abuse therapeutic residential programme. While there, his referring social worker maintained weekly phone contact, identified, worked with and supported safe adults who would provide him with support post-discharge and facilitated regular meetings for these people with Zac. In collaboration with Zac she also identified a foster-care placement in a new community that would protect him from exposure to alcohol and drugs. Drawing on her networks, she advocated with a new school to enrol him. His foster placement lasted until he graduated high school, giving him a level of placement and school stability that was unusual among the young people in the research. It was clear that the continuity between community referral agent, residential provider and post-discharge support facilitated Zac's progress and he talked of feeling safe and supported. While his pathway was not trouble free, the continuity in relationships provided him with a secure base he could use to create a positive future for himself. The collaborative work of all the professionals involved, led by the tireless advocacy of his social worker, along with the change partnership she created with Zac and his foster family represented a powerful ecological intervention. This stood in marked contrast to the outcomes for other youth who reported positive experiences with residential placements but then felt abandoned upon their return home.

Other valuable aspects of multi-layered interventions were seen when practitioners listened to the young person and were honest with them:

Oh I think, 'cause I liked him, he was a good counsellor. He did lots of listening, didn't do a lot of talking like the other ones do.

Yeah, I actually liked the way they worked with you. It was like you know, they're not like someone that's telling you what to do like non-stop or you know, just say all these big words and stuff. You know they got down to your level, and you know, talked to us, you know, just acted like normal people, not like some drug and alcohol workers. She was more the tough love type person. Like you could say the stupidest thing and she would say 'why' and it would make you think and like she'd like make you understand some of the stuff you worry about.

Worker willingness to respond to the specific needs of young people created meaningful interventions that led to change. The capacity to deliver multi-layered responses within the context of positive relational practice sits at the heart of successful interventions with vulnerable youth (Frost 2016; Houston, 2016). It requires that professionals intentionally create strong partnerships between themselves and the young people who seek their support. As is the case in similar work overseas, (Graham, Powell, Thomas & Anderson, 2017; Paulsen & Thomas 2018; Thomas, Graham, Powell & Fitzgerald, 2016), the young people in this study clearly valued trusting and respectful relationships that supported them to address their practical and emotional needs. The recognition from professionals that they had become highly skilled at finding ways to 'get by' and knew how to make the most of scarce resources mattered to the young people.

In summary, key patterns observed in the qualitative data support the patterns seen in the survey data and observations in the international literature that strong, positive professional relationships with youth lead to better outcomes. Honneth's (1995) theory of intersubjective recognition provided a useful lens through which to consider young people's and PMK narratives regarding the service experience. In particular, understanding the way that the young person's social context shaped their behaviours and the options available to them were critical facets of effective interventions. Respectful communication, consistency and continuity contributed to meaningful engagement with young people and there is a substantial literature that demonstrates the connection between these types of practices and better outcomes (Rogers, 2011; Schofield & Beek, 2009; Schofield, Beek, & Ward, 2012; Stein, 2006; Stein et al., 2011). Yet, as young people's accounts have shown, these practices were often missing from service encounters.

Young people more often talked of feeling judged and humiliated. These experiences exacerbated the risks they confronted, and often led to small and large acts of resistance that undermined the efficacy of the intervention and placed the young person at risk of greater harm.

Of course, in the context of their precarious lives, creating continuity is a substantial challenge for professionals (Munford & Sanders, 2015b). Because other adults have often let young people down, broken promises, or left them to cope on their own in dangerous situations, youth often responded to the appearance of another adult in their lives with suspicion. This is why establishing meaningful relationships with them was critical. In creating the conditions that enable youth to be able to trust an adult, professionals demonstrated that they understood the cumulative impacts of 'suffering' (abandonment, harm, abuse, poverty), of broken promises, of being let down, and of limited support networks (Frost & Hoggett, 2008; Rogers, 2011). Consistent with Honneth's (1995) arguments, it also demonstrated that the professional cared enough about the young person to meaningfully address the circumstances that created challenges to their wellbeing. In the process it created opportunities to demonstrate that the professional understood and respected that they had negotiated their precarious circumstances and that these coping capacities were resources that could be harnessed in the intervention (Raineri & Calcaterra, 2015). These relational elements made interventions feel safe and built youth confidence that the professionals involved in their care could be trusted to respond to their practical and psycho-social needs and deliver on their promises. Young people were clear that when practitioners were open and honest with them and engaged with them in respectful ways they were more likely to engage in the support process and to gain benefits from it.

These types of practices encouraged young people to exercise their agency through the intervention rather than to demonstrate it by resisting (Munford & Sanders, 2015a). While often hesitant, resistant or surprised by the appearance of professionals in their lives, the young people were far from uniformly hostile to their presence and rather had a conditional openness to such intervention. When their perspectives and experiences were understood and respected, youth were also more likely to accept conditions placed upon them and to be willing to try strategies that were unfamiliar to them. A mix of practical and emotional support worked well for young people. This mix enabled them to access psycho-social support when they were ready at the same time as their physical needs were met. When they worked well, these relationships compensated for supportive resources that were missing elsewhere in youth lives and, as such, were resources upon which they could draw to make significant changes. As a result, the chances of successful outcomes increased (Forrester et al., 2012; Munford & Sanders, 2015b; Platt, 2012).

DISCUSSION

The survey data pointed to the value youth gained from interventions that were respectful, that encouraged youth agency and that took account of culture and the wider context. It also highlighted that young people's individual risk and resilience profiles improved over time, but that their family risks, in particular, did not change meaningfully. Furthermore, there were complex interactions between risks and the nature of service delivery, such that higher youth risks were linked to declining service quality but increasing service volume. That is, while youth confronting the highest risks were more likely to have a high number of services involved in their lives, they were less likely to receive the high quality interventions that were linked to better outcomes. These findings lend weight to arguments made elsewhere that when outcomes are lower than expected attention needs to be paid to the quality of interactions professionals have with youth (Bastiaanssen et al., 2014; Duncan, et al., 2007; Howe, 1998; Munro, 2011; Ruch, 2005; Turney, 2012).

In this regard, Honneth's intersubjective theory of recognition (1995) reminds us of the critical significance of the human element in interventions; the nature and quality of interactions professionals have with clients matter a lot. Honneth's work provides a theoretical link between the survey and qualitative data. In the qualitative interviews the young people spoke of a need for respect, to be valued and to feel loved and cared about as critical dimensions of the interactions they had with the professionals who became involved in their lives. The survey data illustrated that these types of relationships were linked to better outcomes. In short, when professionals took the time to understand the circumstances of youth lives and demonstrated care and respect, it was more likely that youth would become actively involved in the intervention. The qualitative data thus elaborates upon the key elements of interventions that make a difference and in so doing illustrates why the service quality measure was linked to better outcomes in the survey data.

These results tell us that effective practice requires that professionals invest time in understanding the impact cumulative abuse and harm and disrupted attachments have on young people's development and their ability to easily form trusting relationships with professionals (Munford & Sanders, 2017a). Intractable issues require sustained, careful, respectful and well co-ordinated interventions that address immediate issues but that also, importantly, address the wider contextual risks in which the immediate issues may be embedded (Case, 2006). Episodic interventions that treated referrals as single events missed important information and, as a result, opportunities for focused and targeted interventions were lost. As the survey data clearly demonstrated, more interventions did not lead to better outcomes.

Episodic interventions when youth faced chronic risks rendered plans and strategies for transitions to independence meaningless because they ignored the ongoing and complex nature of youth need.

The consequences of episodic interventions were that on discharge young people gravitated back to their families and communities of origin and to the risks that those environments contained. As seen in the survey data, typically family risks did not change over time. This meant that any gains made were rapidly lost because as Alex noted, youth were sent back to "*drugs and drunks*". Episodic interventions in response to chronic challenges also undermined youth confidence that they could rely on professionals to be available when needed and to respond meaningfully. They were then less likely to be open when professionals subsequently became involved in their lives, again undermining intervention effectiveness. Episodic interventions that did not address underlying needs represented a form of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2006; 2011) because the circumstances that gave rise to the need for outside involvement did not change and thus the promise of an intervention that would improve youth circumstances was broken. In these situations, it should not be surprising when youth subsequently resisted the appearance of professionals in their lives. Resistance was a valuable strategy the young people used to manage challenging lives and gain control over frightening circumstances (Barker & Thomson, 2015; Bottrell, 2009; Haw, 2010; Theron et al., 2011). Like the young people in the current study, others have also found that positive experiences with professionals can be a 'hit and miss' affair (Barker & Thomson, 2015, 141), that when professionals become involved in their lives, young people have no guarantee that that their circumstances will improve.

Part of understanding resistance is learning to recognise the skills and capacities young people bring into the support relationship (Forrester et al., 2012). In this way, the intervention becomes a joint endeavour where the young person can exercise their agency in positive ways (Munford & Sanders, 2015a). Working with the logic of resistance requires suspension of judgement and understanding resistance as defence, protest and coping (Severinsson & Markström, 2015; Trevithick, 2011; Watson, 2011). It means less control and direction, more care and compassion and the nurturing of young people's self-efficacy (Watson, 2011, 467). Youth reported that when practitioners did not label them as 'bad' but as young people trying to deal with their issues in the best ways they could, they were more likely to engage positively with the intervention and it was more likely to be of use.

When professionals saw the real young person beneath the negative labels that had been applied to them, their responses were more likely to be attuned to youth circumstances and youth could see that their worker understood their situations. Rather than individual failing, the circumstances vulnerable youth found themselves in were seen as a product of an inherently unfair system where vulnerable youth are often on the receiving end of cruel policies and discriminatory systems (Frost & Hoggett, 2008). At an individual level, when practice is compassionate and recognises that actions such as resistance are a result of living in precarious and impoverished circumstances, interventions are more likely to succeed. At a structural level, this orientation calls for practitioners to challenge and disrupt ideologies that promote the 'self-care [of individuals] through market relations' (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015, 163) and that blame individuals for the effects of structural conditions and undermine collective responsibility for social and economic wellbeing (Harms Smith, 2015).

There is some guidance in the literature regarding effective strategies for using resistance as a positive resource in interventions. For instance, Bolzan and Gale (2012, 505) develop the concept of an 'interrupted space'. Here youth are given opportunities to participate in new activities and have different types of experiences; in the process young people can explore new ways of being and of interacting with others. A key facet of an interrupted space is that adults ensure youth perspectives and responses receive constructive and supportive responses. This ensures that these new experiences are positive, and respect young people's knowledge and expertise. Through these experiences, youth can learn to trust adults and they also learn how to participate in new activities and settings which in turn create a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.

While interrupted spaces feature the creation of new zones and experiences, Watson (2011, 468) suggests professionals 'roll[ing] with resistance'. Here practitioners work in client's own spaces so that they can observe and make sense of resistance and its function in the context of youth lives. Rolling with resistance uses motivational interviewing techniques which support clients to reflect on their actions and emotions, and through this learn how to harness their resistance as a positive resource. Regardless of the approach taken, what young people in the current study valued was practitioners 'hanging in' with them, even when they tried to 'push them' away. These approaches created open relational spaces (Barker & Thomson, 2015; Reimer, 2013; Ruch et al., 2010; Tassie, 2015; Trevithick, 2014) that enabled the young person to begin to address the issues that brought them into services and the reasons why they resisted engagement.

The key mechanism for change in these circumstances was the specific connection that practitioners established with young people. This agency-oriented approach made the most of the skills, expertise and resources young people brought to the helping relationship (Munford & Sanders, 2015a). This enabled the support relationship to become a change-focused partnership where workers harnessed resistance as a useful resource. Barker and Thomson (2015) argue that to achieve this practitioners need to understand that helping relationships are fundamentally power relationships. This means that relationship building must be approached with care and respect because every action a professional takes will be interpreted as control-based rather than enabling (Barker & Thomson, 2015, 141). Evans' (2007) talks of 'bounded agency' to refer to situations where young people's capacity to exercise control over what happens to them is constrained by others and where their circumstances mean they have a limited range of options and resources available. This concept is useful in work with vulnerable youth because it focuses attention on the contextual constraints that inhibit the capacity of young people to create positive change through their actions alone.

Respectful engagement created a therapeutic alliance: a 'holding space' (Houston 2016, 16) where young people were able to safely share their feelings and experiences knowing that the professional had heard and understood what Bailey described as her "*back life*". This 'closeness and connection, the sense of being cared about, respected and esteemed' (Frost 2016, 11) was transformative for young people in the current study. It created a partnership in change between young people and practitioners where the knowledge and experience of both parties were accorded equal value. The solidarity generated in these respectful reflective processes enabled the emergence of meaningful strategies for positive change.

CONCLUSION

The research reported here sought to answer two questions:

1. When young people come into adolescence at a disadvantage, what factors make the most difference to their capacity to make a successful transition? and,

2. How can systems and the professionals working within them best respond to the challenges these youth face?

To do this, the research followed a large cohort of youth for six years. It explored their experiences of everyday life with a particular focus on their engagement in education and work and the impact that formal services had upon them. The research used survey and qualitative methodologies involving the young person and a person they nominated on the basis that the adult knew a lot about them (PMK).

The youth had multiple system involvement and had been exposed to a broad spectrum of individual and contextual risks across their lives that compromised their capacities to thrive. Their experiences meant that they were highly experienced and knowledgeable about the services and systems that work with vulnerable youth. Their background experiences also meant that they approached adolescence and the transition into young adulthood with significant disadvantages because of restricted access to the normative social, cultural and material resources that assist with this process of development (Berzin & De Marco, 2010).

Others have noted that the absence of these types of resources create major challenges for vulnerable youth as they move through adolescence and into adulthood. This compromises their capacity to support themselves materially and psycho-socially without resorting to offending to survive (see for example, Hardgrove et al., 2015; Osgood et al., 2005). It is an enduring paradox of modern societies that youth with the least access to the material and emotional resources that underpin wellbeing, are those who our systems expend the most resource trying to support, yet these youth face this critical point in their lives with few relationships to fall back on and the least resources to help them make this transition well (Bauman, 2004; Osgood et al., 2005).

Consistent with international observations, the findings suggested that much of the service delivery they received had little or no positive impact (Berzin, 2010; Cicchetti, 2010; DuMont et al., 2007; Garland et al., 2003; Haapasalo, 2000; Haight et al., 2014; Hazen et al., 2004; Sroufe et al., 2005). The findings also indicated that services had particular difficulty responding in helpful ways when youth were exposed to the highest risks. For example, in the survey, data highlighted that youth facing the highest risks had the most services involved in their lives, but over time, this high level of service involvement appeared to exacerbate rather than reduce their contextual risks. Furthermore, the volume of services involved in their lives had no detectable effect on outcomes. In the qualitative interviews youth recounted situations where the involvement of services had led to a deterioration in their circumstances.

The weight of personal responsibility weighed heavily on the shoulders of the young people and shame was a recurring theme in their accounts of their lives and their reflections on their childhoods. As children, they had lacked the capacity to understand that their circumstances were beyond their control and that the adults around them had failed them. Like their counterparts in other countries, they often took responsibility for their circumstances and then experienced shame when they could not meet the expectations of themselves and others (Aaltonen, 2013; Evans, 2002; Zipin et al., 2015). They reported misunderstanding of their needs, being ignored, being judged and disrespected by others and seen as not worthy of support.

At the final interview, the young people were asked to reflect on the preceding six years. Most had aged out of school-based education, the child welfare and child and adolescent mental health systems. As a result, the formal resources and supports available to help them create a secure base for themselves were now confined to the adult mental health system (39% still involved) and the justice system (76% still involved). Four youth had been in prison for the entire course of the study, others had been in and out of prison and interviews had also taken place with youth serving home detention sentences. A feature of the reflection time in the interview was the desire to be free of institutional involvement. In their early 20s now, these young people talked of exhaustion at the impact these systems had on their lives and their despair that they would ever be free of them. Most had debts to the state in the form of court fines, student loans and many had debts to WINZ. The amounts many owed were at a level they could not imagine ever being able to repay, and they felt trapped by this. For the vast majority of youth not relying on illegal forms of income generation, the income support system had also become a significant source of stress in their lives.

The young people talked of repeatedly having to negotiate with these systems over central aspects of their lives. These systems exerted a powerful impact, often constraining their capacity to create a safe and meaningful place for themselves in the adult world.

For most of the youth, the education system had not opened up opportunities and they moved through adolescence missing these key resources. The findings clearly demonstrated that rather than an equaliser of disadvantage, mainstream schools reinforced exclusion and marginalisation, restricting life chances of these very vulnerable young people in the process. As observed elsewhere, practices and policies adopted in mainstream education propelled them into the criminal justice system (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007). Over time, their educational status deteriorated and none of the formal systems appeared to stop this. While a positive school environment (and a positive peer group), did predict better outcomes, the vast majority of the youth did not experience school in these ways. Thus, school had not been a protective factor for these youth. While in the qualitative interviews, youth talked about alternative education as a positive experience, this did not consistently translate into educational credentials that would support positive developmental outcomes. The findings point to a critical need for mainstream schools to fundamentally change their approaches to dealing with vulnerable and high-risk youth if the public education system is to meet its obligations to these young people.

Despite their educational experiences, the young people articulated a strong desire to be given a chance to prove themselves and for opportunities to engage in training or legitimate work that would enable them to be self-sufficient. They expressed a strong work ethic and a desire to contribute. They worried about their looming independence and were uncertain about how to create a place for themselves in the adult world. They articulated a desire to be given a chance to support themselves and those they cared about. These aspirations reflected the normal desires of young people to find a place for themselves in mainstream society.

Often their workforce experiences left them feeling exposed, as they had in education, and vulnerable for all the things they did not know and for the normative experiences of growing up that they had missed. Many lacked the resources that would support them into work and help them to adjust to the demands of full-time work. They faced their futures with considerable anxiety. This anxiety shaped their decision-making and it often explained the survival-based coping strategies they used, including offending. For example, youth explained some of their consumption of substances and alcohol and self-harm as coping strategies. Offending could also represent their efforts to generate income when mainstream options were closed to them.

The young people in this research had childhoods that were characterised by accelerated transitions to autonomy and compressed childhoods (Stein et al., 2011; Rogers, 2011). Their circumstances had demanded that they grow up quickly and take on adult-like caring responsibilities at a young age. They knew how to find money, food and shelter in dangerous places. Those who developed strong coping skills used them to manage the risks they faced at home; they did not have the opportunity to apply them to their positive development. Those with high resilience typically used this to mitigate the risks they confronted and to protect themselves. As discussed below, often this manifested itself in high-risk behaviours and as resistance to service involvement.

As a consequence of their experiences, the young people articulated an intense desire to be self-sufficient. With few nurturing resources around them, they learned to cope with stress, uncertainty and anxiety on their own. They had learned that the adults in their own worlds could not consistently be relied upon to provide the supports and resources they needed to flourish. Many also experienced system responses as punitive and unreliable. As already noted, their coping skills featured self-soothing strategies such as excessive consumption of substances, self-harm and associating with a dangerous peer group that, despite the risks, provided a sense of belonging and opportunities for emotional attachment (Quinn & Poirer, 2005).

Others have also noted that the accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood that characterise populations of youth, such as those in the current study, manifest themselves in non-normative coping behaviours (Ungar, 2011). These coping responses in turn create disadvantages in relation to key adulthood transitions such as when seeking employment (Stein, 2009).The word precariat has been used to describe individuals whose lives are fragile, and this characterises the lives of these youth (Bessant, 2018). For many of the young people, their work experiences were in the black economy and illegal activity. They became skilled at generating income through these avenues. When legitimate work did not provide opportunities for them, they had these other options available to them.

Without effective support to learn the skills and orientations of a mainstream worker, they were vulnerable to becoming trapped in cycles of offending from which they struggled to escape. Rather than assisting them to move away from offending, their attempts to engage with systems to try to find work seemed to conspire against them and make it even harder to make the transition to legitimate work. More often than not, these encounters were experienced as cruel, inhumane and judgemental. Youth often talked of feeling trapped. Most did not find secure work.

Even when in work, many experienced exploitation, expectations that they would work for little or no pay at all and most jobs had precarious, unpredictable hours that meant they were not able to support themselves.

Most of the young people reported a range of risk behaviours, such as substance use, drug dealing, stealing, violence and destructive acts. Sometimes these were coping strategies adopted by the youth. In other cases, youth referenced their risk behaviours as resistance to the intrusion of services in their lives. If interventions were to be effective, they needed to understand the logic of risk and resistance. This called for suspension of judgement and openness on the part of professionals to hearing and understanding young people's explanations regarding the reasons why they behaved in particular ways (Severinsson & Markstrōm, 2015; Trevithick, 2011; Watson, 2011, 467). This understanding could then form the basis for the intervention.

While it often appeared that services did not consistently lead to improved circumstances, both survey and qualitative data did clearly highlight the positive impact that PYD-oriented, relational practices had on outcomes. The findings thus underscore the critical significance of the relational dimension of interventions. The nature and quality of relationships practitioners build with youth determined the success or otherwise of their work. Respectful interventions that responded positively to youth culture and context and which provided meaningful opportunities for youth to become active partners in the support process were related to better outcomes. This relational style of practice requires that practitioners make sure that they understand the logic of youth circumstances and work collaboratively with the youth to find a way forward, rather than judging and directing them. Such approaches require an investment of time to understand the impact of cumulative abuse and harm and disrupted attachments on young people's development and their ability to easily form trusting relationships with professionals (Munford & Sanders, 2017a). The issues these youth face are longstanding, often extending backwards in time to previous generations. Such issues require sustained, careful, respectful and well co-ordinated interventions that respond effectively to the wider contextual risks in which the immediate issues may be embedded (Case, 2006).

Honneth's intersubjective theory of recognition provides a valuable framework for both understanding the ways in which youth circumstances shape their behaviours and for building creative and empowering interventions. The three pillars of love and care, respect and being valued characterised these effective interventions. These interventions were based upon strong connections and trust. Episodic interventions that treated referrals as single events are not effective ways of responding to the complex and multi-layered issues these vulnerable youth

confront. Effective responses were similarly multi-layered. They responded to immediate issues as well as the larger challenges in which these issues were embedded. They addressed both the practical issues, such as material deprivation that youth faced, as well as the emotional issues youth were grappling with. In this process, they supported youth to create sustainable pathways to better futures.

The characteristics of these effective interventions have been summarised elsewhere as PARTH practices (Sanders & Munford, 2019). PARTH provides a trans-disciplinary set of practice principles that support good practice with youth. PARTH focuses attention on how to engage effectively with young people, because the data indicates that the way professionals go about building relationships is critical to successful outcomes:

THE PARTH MODEL

P PASSION, PERSEVERANCE, PERSISTENCE, PERSPECTIVE

A ADAPTABILITY, AGILITY, AGENCY, ACTION-ORIENTED

R RELATIONSHIPS, RESPECT, RECIPROCITY, RELEVANT, RESPONSIVE

T TIME, TRUST, TRANSPARENCY, THRESHOLDS, TRANSITIONS

H HONESTY, HUMILITY, HOPEFUL-ORIENTATION

AN APPROACH TO PRACTICE WITH VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

PASSION, PERSEVERANCE / PERSISTENCE, PERSPECTIVE

Effective practice starts with worker passion. Young people know when workers 'go through the motions', they also know when a worker enjoys working with them and is committed to doing their best for them. Passion helps workers to persevere and persist and to see beneath the negative labels that have been ascribed to young people.

Perseverance is seen in long-term unconditional commitment to supporting youth that counteracts disrupted attachments, fractured relationships, emotional distress and exposure to harm. It compensates for practical and emotional supports that are missing. It means that workers will stay through difficult times. The focus is on understanding how risk and resilience shape young people's experiences and behaviours - the 'whole person' and their context. This means workers need to listen carefully to the young person and respond to practical (e.g. housing, food education etc.) as well as emotional needs.

Perspective highlights the importance of positive youth development and strengths approaches. It emphasises collaborative partnerships with other practitioners and ensures that the needs of the young person remains the centre of attention at all times.

ADAPTABILITY, AGENCY, ACTION ORIENTATION

Adaptable or agile interventions respond to the unique needs of each young person. Practitioners adjust their interactions with young people, look for alternatives and reflect on what they are doing. They are creative in their responses. Adaptable and reflective practice responds to the changing needs of the young person. It requires a mix of interventions both short and long term, practical and emotional. It facilitates a seamless pathway through services, including re-engagement with services when required.

By focusing on supporting youth to exercise agency in positive ways, the young person is kept at the centre of interventions. Practices open up opportunities for young people to test out their skills and to learn how to make decisions and choices through trial and error. This approach provides an enduring and safe presence for youth as they try out new activities and as they learn to make positive decisions. Thus, young people are supported to exercise autonomy in safe ways.

Practice is action-oriented and practitioners work in partnership with young people in solution finding. Practitioners make positive things happen for young people. Practical support is as valuable as emotional and therapeutic support. Practitioners ensure that assessments lead to delivery of services and to meaningful interventions.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE BASED ON: RESPECT AND RECIPROCITY; THEY ARE RELEVANT AND RESPONSIVE

Relational practices demonstrate caring and value. These positive relationships affirm young people's strengths and coping strategies. Relational practices are based on a genuine appreciation of the life the young person has lived. Consistent interactions create stability and build strong relationships. Reactive responses to crises are problematic unless they are embedded in a longer-term process that directly addresses underlying chronic issues and needs, including the effects of impoverished material circumstances. Ecological interventions build relationships across the domains of young people's lives (such as family, community, education) taking account of the risks and challenges young people face. Ecological interventions harness the coping capacities of young people and enhance their support networks to make the most of the resources available (such as facilitating pathways back into education, addressing housing needs, providing access to material resources).

TIME, TRUST, TRANSPARENCY, THRESHOLDS AND TRANSITIONS

The quantity and quality of time is important. The length of interventions will vary depending on youth need. Planning and reflection time is needed to ensure positive encounters with young people and to find possibilities for critical learning moments for them. It takes time to build trusting relationships, particularly when young people have previous experience of professional involvement as dehumanising, judgemental and punitive and that has not addressed youth needs. Time also refers to the importance of predictability, routine and structure. Practitioners can provide 'containment'; a safe environment where opportunities to learn skills for managing issues and space to think differently about the future are provided. Trust is a cornerstone of meaningful practice which is facilitated by transparency.

Transparency involves taking the time to ensure that young people understand the why and how of decisions and that they are involved in decision-making. It also requires that practitioners ensure youth are fully informed and involved in planning for the future. Threshold and entry criteria often mean that interventions do not happen until after harm has been done. Interventions need to be timely and respond to the unique needs of the young person.

Transitions for vulnerable young people are another important focus for practitioners as given their challenging circumstances these young people have experienced compressed and accelerated transitions. Transitions between services and transitions out of services to independence need careful planning and management to ensure the best outcomes are achieved. Transition planning occurs right from the beginning rather than being something that is hastily addressed as the young person's discharge looms.

Honesty, humility, a hopeful orientation

Honesty means that practitioners keep their word, they do what they say they will do, and they tell young people what they are doing. They are honest about their limitations. They keep young people informed of processes and decisions, and when difficult decisions have to be made, they are honest about this and work this through with the young person.

Humility reminds practitioners to recognise that if they were in the young person's shoes they might well make the same choices as the young person.

Holding the young person's story and holding their hope and a vision for the future is critical to successful practice. This relationship can be the place where young people gain the confidence to talk about their dreams and where they are supported to access resources and develop the skills needed to realise positive identities and different futures.

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Pathways to Resilience and Youth Transitions Research

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The Youth Transitions Study: Final Report

Munford, R

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