



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Who and what works in natural mentoring?

A relational approach to improve the effectiveness of youth care

van Dam, L.

Publication date

2018

Document Version

Other version

License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Dam, L. (2018). *Who and what works in natural mentoring? A relational approach to improve the effectiveness of youth care*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



CHAPTER

6

Natural Mentoring in The Context of a Therapeutic Intervention: A Delicate Balance Between Improving Relationship Quality and Keeping It Natural.

Chapter submitted for publication.

Van Dam, L., Bakhuizen, R. E., Schwartz, S. E. O., De Winter, M., Zwaanswijk, M., Wissink, I., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2018). Natural Mentoring in The Context of a Therapeutic Intervention: A Delicate Balance Between Improving Relationship Quality and Keeping It Natural.

ABSTRACT

The present qualitative study provides an in-depth analysis of the Youth Initiated Mentoring (YIM) approach for youth at-risk for out-of-home placement. In this approach, a youth nominates a natural mentor from within their social network, and positions this person as a YIM who can then function as an ally for the youngster and as a partner for parents and professional caregivers. Through interviews with six youth, six YIMs and seven parents, forming six triads ($N = 19$), we examined the social dynamics and their perceived sustainability. The results indicated that attitudes from participants towards asking someone or being asked to become YIM varied from enthusiastic to cautious. The majority of participants reported benefits in terms of increased contact intensity and relationship quality. Two parents did not experience the YIM as beneficial. Most participants thought the YIM-mentee relationship would last after ending professional care. The results reveal that youth experience YIM as an ally, however, the approach also has the potential to elicit an increase of relational conflicts between family and social network members.

INTRODUCTION

Although much research has focused on the role of parents in the development of children and adolescents, the role of other community adults, including family friends, neighbors, and teachers, has only recently been recognized as playing a vital role in the well-being of young people (Bowers, Johnson, Warren, Tirrell, & Lerner, 2015; Kesselring, De Winter, Van Yperen, & Lecluijze, 2016). Studies suggest that approximately three-quarters of adolescents have natural mentors within their social networks (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009; Raposa, Dietz, & Rhodes, 2017). A natural mentor is the result of an organically developing relationship between an adolescent and an older or more experienced individual who provides guidance and support over time. In contrast, formal mentoring programs, in which a volunteer is matched with a young person, reach an estimated 7% of youth (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009; Raposa, Dietz, & Rhodes, 2017).

A recent meta-analysis of the effect of formal mentoring programs on positive youth outcomes showed a small overall average effect size of $d = .19$ (Raposa et al., 2018). Similarly, a recent meta-analytic study on natural mentoring relationships showed that the mere *presence* of a natural mentor was associated with positive youth outcomes, with a small overall average effect size of Cohen's $d = .21$ (Van Dam, et al., in press). The association between the *quality* of the natural mentoring relationship (relatedness, social support and autonomy support) and positive youth outcomes yielded a medium overall average effect size ($d = .43$), with the largest effect sizes for social-emotional development ($d = .55$), and academic and vocational functioning ($d = .40$), and a small effect size ($d = .20$) for psychosocial problems. Notably, at-risk status (for instance, teenage mothers, homeless youth, youth in foster care and children of alcoholic parents) did not moderate the relation between presence and quality of natural mentoring relationships on the one hand and youth outcomes on the other hand, which is a positive finding for adolescents with complex needs.

At-risk youth can benefit from natural mentoring relationships, but individual and contextual risk factors, such as high levels of family or neighborhood risk, can lead to generalized relationship dissatisfaction and negative expectations of the availability and social support of significant others (e.g., Shumaker, Deutsch, & Brennikmeyer, 2009), which may negatively influence the mentoring relationship (Raposa, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2016). The lack of individual capacities, such as insufficient skills to develop and maintain reciprocal social relationships, make it harder for at-risk youth to organically develop natural mentoring relationship (Greeson, Thompson, Ali, & Wenger, 2015). Social workers are mainly focused on delivering care, and less on promoting social inclusion (McConkey, & Collins, 2010) and increasing social capital (Hawkins & Maurer, 2012). Therefore, and based on the insights derived from studies on the effects of both formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring relationships (Raposa et al., 2018; Van Dam, et al., in press), the new hybrid YIM-approach

(Youth Initiated Mentor: YIM) was developed to support youth with complex needs to use the natural resources available in their extended family networks (Schwartz et al., 2013; Van Dam et al., 2017).

Although preliminary research on YIM showed promising results, important challenges related to combining natural and formal approaches to mentoring arose in practice. For example, if professionals intervene to deliberately take advantage of the expected positive effects of a relationship with an existing *natural* mentor, one may question how natural such a relationship remains, and whether its assumed intrinsic positive influence may be reduced or even lost by formalizing it. Professionals refer to this dilemma as the *natural paradox*. The current study examines the social dynamics within triads of youth, parents, and YIM, and how these dynamics may be influenced by the transition from natural mentor to YIM.

NATURAL MENTORING INTEGRATED IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CARE

A hybrid approach for youth with complex needs

The YIM-approach can be considered as a hybrid approach integrating formal and informal care, in which the focus is on empowering the adolescent's network through the positioning of and collaboration with an informal mentor, designated as a YIM. This informal mentor is a person (e.g., relative, neighbour, or friend) adolescents nominate from their own social network, who functions as a confidant and spokesman for the adolescent, and as a cooperation partner for parents and professionals (Schwartz et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2016; Van Dam et al., 2017). In the context of youth with complex needs, the mentor (or: YIM) works with family members and the professional team to increase or take advantage of the already existing resiliency of the youth and family, and thereby improves their functioning (Van Dam & Verhulst, 2016). This fits with the international movement in child and family social work to make use of the strengths of families and their own social networks, and to stimulate client participation (Burford, 2005), and shared decision making between the client system and professionals (Bartelink, Van Yperen, & Ten Berge, 2015). It is also in line with the involvement of the educative civil society, in which the joint activities of citizens in the upbringing of children and adolescents are emphasized (Burford, 2005; Van Dijken, Stams, & De Winter, 2016; 2017).

The YIM approach starts with a focus on 'who', in which the youth and family identify a member of the social network who could become the YIM (first phase). After identification of the YIM, the focus is on 'what,' i.e., investigating each person's perspective on the current and desired situation (second phase). The third phase is focused on establishing 'how', exploring how each participant can contribute to the desired situation. The final fourth phase is focused on 'adaptivity', i.e., the degree to which the current informal pedagogical alliance can meet new challenges. During the first phase, professionals (e.g., therapist, social worker, etc.) stimulate youth to nominate a person they trust in their environment (*eliciting*). After nomination, the YIM is *informed* about the YIM-position and *appointments* are made about privacy, termination and the type of support he or she provides when *installed* as 'the YIM'. During this first phase, professionals actively help youth to identify an adult whom the youth trusts.

Previous research on the effectiveness of another hybrid approach combining formal and informal care, designated as family group conferences (a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child who is at risk for maltreatment), did not find robust empirical evidence for its effectiveness (Dijkstra et al., 2016). It even reported non-anticipated results that may be evaluated as negative from a family preservation perspective, such as an increase in the number and length of out-of-home placements for older children and minority groups. Therefore, it is important to know

more about the social dynamics of integrating formal and informal care through the positioning of a social network member as YIM, and how people experience this positioning process.

Social dynamics and sustainability

Social dynamics concern the interplay between individuals and the groups in which they participate; the position – a place or status – of individuals in a group represents cognition, emotion, action, and perception (Harre et al., 2009). Position theory states that *actions* of people (verbal and non-verbal) create *rights and duties* between people and result in personal *narratives*, which in itself are *meaningful*. The combination of actions, rights, duties, narratives and meaning creates the social dynamics in which the family members, natural mentor and the professional navigate.

Position theory identifies three positions: the first-order status refers to being the candidate status for a position; the second-order status is to have an acknowledged position, implicit or explicit; and the third-order status is “having a footing” or actually being valued and listened to. A natural mentor with “footing” should increase epistemic trust in youth, that is, the receptiveness to the social knowledge from their social environment (Gergely, Egyed, & Kiraly, 2007), enabling the youngster to benefit from the knowledge available in the social network (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Fonagy, Luyten, Allison, & Campbell, 2017).

Collaborating with a YIM with footing – the third order status – is collaborating with a YIM in which the youngster has trust. But this does not necessarily mean the parents share this trust. They may not agree with the YIM selected by the youngster, because of his or her background (e.g., school drop-out or drug abuse) or because of earlier negative experiences between parent(s) and this person. These differential narratives are crucial, because they result in different interaction patterns that create exchanges between youth and parent or youth and mentor, which may either support or undermine the success of the intervention (Keller, 2005).

Sustainability is an important benefit of natural mentoring (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Keller, 2005). Formalizing a relationship with someone already known to the youngster may improve relationship quality and consequently increase its durability, because these mentors start with a high level of investment in their protégés and are less vulnerable to the disappointments and dashed expectations that may be experienced in formal mentoring relationships (Spencer et al., 2016).

Sustainable natural mentoring relationships are particularly valuable for youth with mental health needs, because they tend to prefer informal support rather than professional care; generally, seeking informal help is a first step that precedes professional service use (Rickwood, Mazzer, & Telford, 2015). To create sustainable relationships, the approval of parents on the involvement of others in childrearing practices is crucial, but parents may feel ambivalent about this. Research suggests that parents tend to prefer involvement of others in activities that do not focus explicitly on childrearing, but assist them in handling parenting tasks or give them the opportunity to exchange

experiences (Kesselring et al., 2012). Taken together: the YIM process might start with ‘high hopes’ from all parties involved, but it is unclear how these expectations become sustainable realities in the context of an ongoing relationship.

In sum, natural mentors are embedded within the social networks of youth with complex needs, but these adolescents could use support to develop such a relationship. Therefore, YIM represents a hybrid approach in which professionals stimulate and facilitate youth to collaborate with their natural mentors. The positioning of these informal mentors by professionals results in new social interactions and dynamics between youth, parents, and mentors. The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain insight into participants’ perspectives on the shift in position to YIM (e.g., what participants experience when they are asked or ask someone to become YIM, what a YIM needs to fulfil his position, what his role or tasks are) and its effects on social dynamics and perceived sustainability. Qualitative in-depth interviews with all three triad members from six relationship triangles ($N = 19$ subjects) create a 360° perspective – the youth, his or her parent(s) and the YIM – and shed light on the positioning process and each perspective on sustainability.

METHODS

Participants

Six relationship triads included six youths between 15 and 18 years of age ($M = 16.3$, $SD = 1.21$), their parents, between 42 and 62 years of age ($n = 7$, $M = 51.3$, $SD = 6.0$), and the YIMs who varied in age from 28 till 55 ($n = 6$, $M = 41.8$, $SD = 9.3$). In total, 84% ($n = 16$) of all triad members were Dutch, one person was Antillean and two were Guianese. All youths ($n = 6$) attended school, one attended a special education school. All parents and YIMs ($n = 13$) had completed formal education, varying between vocational training schools and university. Two YIMs were friends of the mother of the mentee, one was an ex-mother-in-law, one was a former cop, one a former school mentor and another one was a friend of the youngster.

Procedures

All participating families collaborated with a positioned YIM, they completed the approximately six months standard period of treatment. In total 21 families received a letter in which the research question was explained, and they were informed about their privacy and the scientific purpose of this study. After receiving the letter, all families received a phone call with more detailed information about the study, in which they were asked to participate. All three parties (parent(s), youngster and YIM) needed to consent to be able to participate. In total 10 different family members agreed to participate, but within six families the complete triad agreed, and therefore were included in the study. Participants filled out an informed consent statement and received five euros for compensation.

The interviews were conducted with each participant individually to prevent influences from other triad members. Fourteen interviews were conducted face to face and five by telephone. The interview contained 22 open questions for parents, 21 for youngsters and 19 for YIMs. The total duration of each interview was around 30-45 minutes. The interview was recorded and transcribed, the transcription was sent to each participant to make adjustments if necessary. All participants agreed with the transcription.

Measures

Demographics (e.g., age, gender, nationality, etc.) were collected through a short questionnaire after the interview. Based on literature study we developed a topic guide (see Appendix 1) resulting in a semi-structured interview, which focused on the following two theoretical principles.

Social dynamics: Participants were interviewed about their action/response when they asked someone or were asked to become YIM (*actions*), about their ideas regarding what a YIM needs to fulfil his position and what his role or tasks are (*rights and duties*) and the impact of being positioned as YIM (*narratives and meaning*).

Sustainability. Since sustainability is an important benefit of natural mentoring, participants were asked if they thought the YIM-youth relationship would last when professional care would be ended.

Analysis

The first and second author conducted in-depth readings of the complete interview transcripts. An initial codebook was established based on the six areas we theoretically explored: (a) initial response to the invitation to become YIM, (b) requirements to fulfill the role of YIM, (c) vision on the role or task of a YIM, (d) changes because of formalizing the involvement as YIM, (e) a sense of purpose and meaning and (f) perspective on the sustainability of the involvement of a YIM.

The transcripts were coded based on the initial codebook, new sub-categories were identified in order to categorize participants. Initial themes were identified by the second author and verified by the first author, using the iterative thematic approach from Boeije (2005). The last author served as master coder, reviewing the work of and providing feedback to the other coders to ensure consistency in coding across cases. Coders met biweekly to discuss questions and clarify definitions related to coding categories. Transcription and data analysis were in Dutch, key quotes were translated into English.

RESULTS*Summary*

Four triads reported some tensions in their relationships: three because of ongoing arguments between parent and child (not YIM-related), one because the parent did not support the chosen YIM. The other two triads reported positive contact between all parties involved. The attitudes from youth, parents and YIMs towards asking someone to become YIM varied from enthusiastic to cautious. All parties agreed that when someone becomes a YIM, they gain certain rights, such as getting information from the family and professionals about the problem situation and its development, as well as intensified contact with mentor and mentee and appointments with all participants. Several responsibilities of a YIM were also identified, such as offering personal care and guidance for youth, giving advice (to the family and professionals) and offering practical support to youth. Parents and youth stated that YIMs did not need extra support to fulfill their role, but some parents suggested YIMs could benefit from professional support. All six youths said it was valuable that the person was positioned as YIM. Two parents did not experience the YIM as beneficial, the other 5 parents did value the positioning of a YIM. The positioning as YIM did not change most YIMs' experiences of the relationship. Most participants thought the YIM-mentee relationship would last after ending professional care.

Social dynamics in the triad

Regarding social dynamics the results of our analyses signified that in one triad the mother did not support the decision to work with a YIM and did not support the choice her son made, mother (53): *'My son may choose her, but that doesn't mean I can talk to her. I agreed, because if he (her son) wants this, go ahead, I can't say he must choose someone else. But she was involved with my son too strongly, which I understand from her (the YIM) perspective, but to me it meant we couldn't relate anymore.'* In hindsight, this parent thought the YIM-process had needed more professional guidance. The results showed indications of experienced tension between parent(s) and youth for three other triads as well, however, in these cases the contact between parent and YIM and YIM and youth was positive: *'The current situation at home is sometimes unbearable, at those moments I call her (YIM)',* (girl, aged 17). In the last two triads, all parties involved agreed with the positioning of the selected YIM. Mother (50) said: *'If this approach works I think it is wonderful to solve these issues with people you know instead of with unknown professionals.'*

Perspectives of youths.

Actions. In the answers of youths on the question 'What did you experience when you asked this person to become YIM?', two types of reactions were identified: *pro-active* ($n = 3$) and *cautious* ($n =$

3). Pro-active youth said it felt good and natural to ask this person and that they did not experience any stress. One girl (aged 15) said: *'Actually, I didn't really need to ask her, she (the YIM) already mentioned she wanted to help, that's why it was the obvious thing to ask her'*. Cautious youth were more hesitant: one youth was found to have liked to have someone offering a listening ear, but he did not want this person to be involved in his home situation, and another one thought it was a scary thing to ask. Two adolescents said their parents suggested someone: *'My mom suggested him. Initially the idea scared me, I didn't know how he would react. In the end it went well, we just asked him to support us'*. (girl, aged 17)

Four youths recalled that the YIMs were happy and glad to support them, although two noted their YIM wanted to learn more about what being a YIM entailed: *'He reacted positively, saying he wanted to help, but he also wanted to know more about what was actually asked'* (girl, aged 17). Five youths described the experience as positive: they thought the reactions of their mentors were kind, and it made them happy and gave them a *'safe feeling'*. One youngster did not feel anything in response to the reaction of the YIM.

Rights. Regarding the rights the results showed that three youths thought the person who became their YIM ought to have (more) contact with their parents and themselves. Two youths mentioned that appointments were necessary between the youngster, YIM, and parents, in order to collaborate with each other: *'It was obvious that between my mother and the YIM a clear line needs to be drawn, indicating my mom is and stays the parent. This was necessary because it was difficult for my mom that I was about to express my feelings to another adult. It felt like stepping into her territory'* (boy, aged 18). The results also demonstrated that three youths thought the person positioned as YIM needed nothing extra because they were 'good by nature'. None of the youths remembered the YIMs discussing their rights with the family and involved professionals.

Duties. Three duties of the YIM were identified in the adolescents' reactions: 1) offering personal care and support ($n = 5$), such as communicating with each other, offering a safe-haven, being understanding and not being 'pushy'. *'She definitely needs to understand me, especially because a new person (the social worker) becomes involved. She understands me and can help me to understand things and can explain things to me in a language I understand.'* (girl, aged 15). Aspects such as 'translating my needs to adult language' and being more objective were identified as offering 2) guidance and advice ($n = 2$). Offering 3) practical support ($n = 4$) was the third duty, indicating youths wanted support from their YIM when needed (at home or by telephone), and two youngsters mentioned that the YIM should offer accommodation if needed.

Narrative. Five youths said their relationship with the YIM intensified, they had contact more frequently, talked a lot, were involved in the process and felt the urge to open up. *'For example, when something happens with my mom, I immediately want to talk to K. (YIM). I really felt the urge to open up, because I finally had someone in my own environment I trust.'* (boy, aged 18).

Two youths could not answer the question if the relationship between parent and YIM changed. Three youths said the relationship quality between the YIM and the parent improved, because of an increase in contact and because the YIM got to know the parent. One youth mentioned the YIM sometimes confronted his mother with her behavior: *'Once, my mom had an argument with him, she had an appointment at her work and E. (YIM) said she needed to be there for me. I felt supported, but my mom was a bit intimidated.'* (boy, aged 16).

Meaning. All six youths said it was meaningful that the person was positioned as YIM, they experienced feelings of joy, reported good conversations, someone 'you can tell your story to' and a spokesman: *'You don't constantly have a new counsellor you have to go to, but just one person who is always there for you when you feel sad. I felt better represented'* (boy, aged 18).

Perspectives of parents.

Action. Parents' reactions to the idea of asking a social network member to become YIM can also be divided in *pro-active* ($n = 4$) and *cautious* ($n = 3$). The pro-active parents said bringing in a YIM gave them trust in the future of their child. One mother stated she was happy that her daughter found another mother-figure, the others felt less demoralized by the challenges their children were experiencing and thought it was nice that their child had asked someone to become YIM: *'Knowing he is at a safe place where he is being loved and gets attention, gives me less sorrow. I think it is brave he followed his own feelings and made this choice.'* (mother, 50). The three cautious parents experienced the YIM-concept as a *'preliminary theoretical concept from professionals'*, had mixed feelings about asking someone or about the person being asked, or were afraid to ask someone: *'Actually, I didn't want this and I didn't dare to ask someone. In the end, our social worker asked the one we had in mind. To me this was ok, otherwise it wouldn't have happened at all. But it also illustrates that this approach is really personal, it's about the way you live, what you share with the people surrounding you, and how you value personal relationships. That's also why I think the whole concept has a lot of risks.'* (mother, 42).

Rights. Two parents thought the person who became YIM needed (practical) information about appointments, treatment plan and sometimes family history. Four parents stated the YIM needed nothing extra to fulfill his new position, the YIM could *'stay the same'* although he had taken a more parental role: *'Normally you would say that a new person needs to know a lot about our*

personal situation, now this wasn't necessary, therefore it was a good choice.' (father, 62). One parent suggested that the YIM needed professional support to function optimally: *'During the program I also saw she (YIM) sometimes needed support from professionals to make a statement against my daughter.'* (father, 53). None of the parents remembered the YIMs discussing their rights with the family and involved professionals.

Duties. All parents mentioned personal care and support ($n = 7$), such as offering someone to talk to, being a spokesperson and someone to empathize with: *'To me it felt like a relief from the burden I experienced. I just didn't know how to cope with the stressful situations anymore, and being in this together felt like a positive distraction.'* (mother, 42). All parents mentioned guidance and advice ($n = 7$), regarding how to deal with arguments at school and at home, and functioning as a bridge between parents and youngster. Offering practical support ($n = 6$) was also appreciated by parents, e.g., a home to go to and attending meetings. Two parents stated that the YIM should stay neutral: *'I think a YIM functions at his best when he listens and tries to tell professionals and, if necessary, parents, what's on a kid's mind. I don't think a YIM should just represent a youngster or even think he can help the youngster.'* (mother, 53).

Narrative. Four parents said their relationship with the YIM intensified, they described it as closer, more intimate, special and more open. One parent told it stimulated their friendship: *'Our friendship stayed and even got more stimulated. Through him (YIM) I better understood my own son. He didn't say: 'You must do it like this', he'd rather say: 'You can also perceive it from this angle'. From that moment on I perceived my son differently, and started talking more openly with him.'* (mother, 51). One parent had no contact with the YIM, and told her relationship with the YIM worsened after the positioning of the YIM: *'I don't have contact with her. During our first meeting she made some statements that went down the wrong way. After this meeting, I really didn't feel like having any contact with her at all.'* (mother, 53).

Four parents said the role of this person after becoming a YIM changed, he became more of a coach, the contact became more open, they received more advice and saw this person felt more responsibility for their child. Five parents said the relationship between the youngster and YIM improved, it made them feel like 'this is my person to go to': *'She really saw him more as a family member, more than before.'* (mother, 42). One parent said nothing changed and another one did not know if anything changed after the positioning of a YIM.

Meaning. For two parents the YIM was not valuable, he helped in a crisis situation, but the contact went wrong: *'I've seen her twice, but I just didn't like her. It's OK that my son perceives her as a second mom, but for me contact with her just required too much'* (mother, 53). Five parents valued the

positioning of a YIM, they experienced less stress and thought it was a relief that their child always had this place and person to go to. Two parents said they also could always reach out to the YIM, one perceived it as his personal support and guidance, and another one felt understood. One parent was positive, but also warned about the risks: *'When they started asking 'who can be the YIM' I felt misunderstood. In my case, you really need a special person, a wrong person could have escalated the situation even further.'* (mother, 42).

Perspectives of the YIMs

Action. Two type of reactions were identified: *pro-active* ($n = 3$) and *cautious* ($n = 3$). The pro-active YIMs thought becoming a YIM was the logical thing to do, two of them felt honored and one was thankful to be able to help: *'I thought 'Yes, of course. Immediately!', I didn't need a moment to think about it, actually I was honored to be asked.'* (woman, 43). Another said: *'I had goosebumps when she asked me. This was so cool and of course I want to help!'* (male YIM, 28). The cautious YIMs were happy with the trust the youngster had in them, but they also experienced some kind of discomfort: *'I was happy with the trust he expressed in me, but also a little cautious because I didn't know him that well (she is a mother in law). I experienced tension about how to help him, because I knew so little about him or his family and friends.'* (woman, 46). Those YIMs also did not regard themselves as YIM: *'I don't know what a YIM is and I don't perceive myself as one. These people are good friends of mine and I just want to help them.'* (male YIM, 44).

Rights. To suit their new position, YIMs thought they needed information ($n = 2$) about the well-being of the youngster and the treatment plan. Four YIMs also wanted contact with professionals involved in treatment. One missed this: *'I really missed it that the professional care organization didn't offer some kind of education or support in which it became clear what they expect from a YIM. Or at least support that YIMs meet one another, so they can support each other.'* (male YIM, 35). Regarding their newly acquired role, four persons also wanted appointments about their role as YIM, for example, about how much time they could be available. All YIMs mentioned they discussed their vision on their rights with the family and involved professionals.

Duties. Three duties were identified: 1) personal care and support ($n = 6$): *'I think it is relevant that they know someone always will be there for them. It doesn't matter when and how. That's a nice and safe feeling.'* (woman, 43). Activities, such as mediation, advise and supervising were identified as 2) guidance and advice ($n = 4$): *'I look after her, recognize change and discuss this with her.'* (woman, 55). Offering 3) practical support ($n = 3$) was the third duty, YIMs mentioned they offered daily rhythm and structure and two also offered accommodation if needed: *'I felt like a helpdesk and maybe more importantly, I offered him a home.'* (woman, 46).

Narrative. Four YIMs noticed some overall change after becoming YIM, they had more contact with parents ($n = 2$), experienced more responsibility ($n = 2$) and one perceived it as 'having an extra son'. Two YIMs thought becoming YIM was a formalization of their already existing role: *'Actually, I already was the YIM. That didn't change, it is only appointed, but what I do now, I already did before becoming YIM.'* (woman, 43).

Three YIMs said nothing changed in their relationship with the youngster, one mentioned that the youngster now took the initiative to reach out and one stated the relationship quality between them improved. Four YIMs thought the parent-child relationship improved, one thought it still was the same, and one said it was not stable.

Meaning. Two YIMs said the process of being positioned mattered to them, it gave them 'a good feeling', 'excitement' and 'more responsibility'. The other four YIMs mentioned less or no effect because they would have taken this role anyway: *'It was explained with cards and pictures, but to be honest, I'm involved with the family, but not in the way these professionals put it.'* (male YIM, 44).

Sustainability

All participants were asked if they thought the YIM-mentee relationship would last when professional care would be ended. Five youths thought the YIM would stay meaningful, two thought they still would have a place to go to when in need, one youth mentioned he and the YIM would still discuss everything, and another one said they still would see each other. A male adolescent (15) explained: *'If professionals leave, I know I can still count on M. I can still go to her place when in need or when I have trouble with my mom. She will listen to my story, give me advice and maybe call my mom. She will help me restore stuff when I messed up.'* One youth had no positive expectations about the relationship with the YIM when professional care would end, because his romantic relationship with her daughter ended (the YIM in this case was the mother of his ex-girlfriend).

Six out of seven parents expected an active bond to remain between their child and the YIM after the ending of professional care. Their expectations varied from keeping in contact, functioning as a safe haven, trusting the person and keeping a guiding and supporting role. They also hoped the relationship would last, as a father (62) stated: *'I hope the YIM stays, so we as parents and our daughter can still rely on him.'* One parent had no expectations whatsoever, they were unsure about it.

All YIMs thought they would still be involved, a female YIM (55) said: *'When I became YIM I immediately told N. (youth) this wouldn't change our bond and if professional care leaves, I'd stay.'* Three YIMs described it as an active bond, one mentioned weekly contact and two described

their bond as unconditional, and thought they would never leave this adolescent behind. The other three YIMs described it as a supportive function, meaning that they would be a role model and help the youngster when he/she was in need.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study focused on the social dynamics and sustainability when a social network member is positioned as YIM. Our main research questions were: what do participants experience when they are asked or ask someone to become YIM, what does a YIM need to fulfil his position and what are his role or tasks, what is the impact of being positioned as YIM and is this relationship identified as sustainable?

Two triads reported positive social interactions, but most triads reported some tensions in their relationships because of ongoing (not YIM-related) arguments between parent and child, one triad reported tensions because the parent did not support the chosen YIM. The latter underscores the notion that parents are important during the mentor selection process. Previous research has shown that collaborating with parents during the selection process is appreciated and empowers them to suggest mentors or vetoing mentors they felt were not a good fit (Spencer, Gowdy, Drew, & Rhodes, 2018). From all three different perspectives (adolescent, parents and YIM) asking someone to become YIM was perceived either positive (pro-active) or with some hesitation (cautious), which indicates that asking someone formally to become a YIM sounds natural, but can elevate stress.

The insight that the position of the social network member changes after becoming YIM is supported by the fact that all parties agreed that the positioning is accompanied with rights, such as getting information, intensified contact, agreements, and duties, such as offering personal care, guidance, advice and practical support. Although some parents and youths also stated that YIMs did not need anything extra – and parents thought YIMs needed professional support and should not take sides – the fact that they all agreed on these rights and duties indicates a position as YIM differs from a position as an extended family network member in general.

Although the relationship between YIM and youth may not be totally natural anymore, all six youths said it was valuable that the person was positioned as YIM. They experienced feelings of joy, and perceived the YIM as someone 'you can tell your story to' and a spokesman. Two parents did not experience the YIM as meaningful, he helped in a crisis situation, but the contact between them deteriorated. The other parents positively valued the positioning of a YIM, they experienced less stress and thought it was a relief that their child always had this place and person to go to. The positioning as YIM did not change anything for most YIMs, because they would have taken this role anyway. Two YIMs reported positive feelings about the positioning process. The findings gave more insight in the reticence of parents about involving others in childrearing practices (Kesselring et al., 2012). Nevertheless, they did not confirm previous findings that the social network may actively discourage youth and his or her parents from seeking help (Dozier et al., 2009).

Most participants thought the YIM-mentee relationship would last when professional care would be ended. Youngsters perceived the relationship as meaningful and the YIM to be a person

to go to when in need. Parents expected and hoped for an active bond, while their expectations varied between keeping in contact, functioning as a safe haven, trusting the person and keeping a guiding and supporting role. All YIMs thought they would still be involved, actively and supportively. Previous research has considered sustainability as an important benefit of natural mentoring (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2013; Keller, 2005), the relationship increases stability in the social networks of youth (Keller & Blakeslee, 2013) and improves interactions with other adults (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liag, & Noam, 2006). Our findings indicate that the bond between a youngster and his mentor is influenced by parents (Keller, 2005), but is also unique, that is, a distinct process.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was small, although in qualitative research saturation could occur with approximately six participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), which depends on the richness of the data and the degree of heterogeneity of the sample (Bryman, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). None of the YIMs was a family member, which does not allow generalizing our study findings to YIMs as family members. This is why the external validity of this study is limited (Bryman, 2012). Future studies should take this into account and include family members who became YIM. Our study did not include parents and youths who were not willing to cooperate with a natural mentor, which was roughly 20% of the participants in a previous study (Van Dam et al., 2017). Self-selection is another important limitation: those who agreed to be interviewed may have had more positive experiences or may have differed in other ways from those who refused. Prospective studies following the development of these relationships over time and beyond the therapeutic intervention are needed to more fully assess the social dynamics and sustainability.

This is the first study examining the hybrid approach of natural mentoring in which youth, parents and YIM are involved. Interviewing all participants on the same topics increased the internal validity (Everaert & van Peet, 2006), and by using a combination of structured and open questions participants could express all relevant experiences (Galletta, 2013). Nevertheless, future studies should include professional caregivers, to get a complete picture.

An advantage of the YIM-approach is that it makes use of already existing relationships in the context of a therapeutic intervention, which is in line with research showing that strong emotional connections between youth and mentor are important relationship features related to better youth outcomes (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Van Dam et al., 2017). Also, YIM-relationships appear to be long-lasting (Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013), and are an alternative to formal mentoring where long waiting lists exist due to difficulties with the recruitment of volunteer mentors (Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, Tugenberg, Ocean, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2016).

The majority of participants reported positive experiences, nevertheless, some participants were cautious regarding asking someone or being asked to become a YIM, and not all parents experienced the YIM as beneficial. Therefore, this approach can also elicit an increase of relational conflicts between family and social network members. Future studies should examine professional

practices that may effectively facilitate the revenue of natural mentoring relationships without jeopardizing the existing organically developed relationships. This provides caregivers with tools to prevent possible further damage to the vulnerable social networks of at-risk youth when professional involvement aims to use natural mentoring relationships within a therapeutic intervention.

APPENDIX 1 – TOPIC LIST INTERVIEWS*Topic list – YIM**Social dynamics*

- Can you describe how you responded to the invitation to become YIM? (*Actions*)
- What did you need to fulfill your role as a YIM? (*Rights*)
- What do you see as your role or task as a YIM? (*Duties*)
- Did anything change after becoming YIM? (*Narratives*)
- What does being a YIM mean to you? (*Meaning*)

Sustainability

- What will happen with your involvement as YIM, when professional care leaves?

*Topic list – parents and youth**Social dynamics*

- Can you describe how the YIM responded to the invitation to become YIM? (*Actions*)
- What do you think the YIM needs to fulfill his role as YIM? (*Rights*)
- What do you see as the role or task for a YIM? (*Duties*)
- Did anything change after he/she became YIM? (*Narratives*)
- What does it mean to you that he/she became a YIM? (*Meaning*)

Sustainability

- What will happen with the involvement of YIM, when professional care leaves?

REFERENCES

- Abramson, D. M., Park, Y. S., Stehling-Ariza, T., & Redlener, I. (2010) 'Children as bellwethers of recovery: Dysfunctional systems and the effects of parents, households, and neighborhoods on serious emotional disturbance in children after Hurricane Katrina', *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 4(Suppl 1), pp. 17–27.
- Boeije, H. (2005). *Analyseren in kwalitatief onderzoek*. Boom Onderwijs: Amsterdam
- Bowers, E. P., Johnson, S. K., Warren, D. J. A., Tirrell, J. M., & Lerner, J. V. (2015). Youth–adult relationships and positive youth development. In E. P. Bowers (Ed.), *Promoting positive youth development* (pp. 97-120). http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-17166-1_6.
- Bartelink C, van Yperen, T. A., & Ten Berge, I. J. (2015). Deciding on child maltreatment: a literature review on methods that improve decision-making. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 15, 00231-00238.
- Bronfenbrenner & Morris, (2007) 'The Bioecological model of human development', In R. M. Lerner (eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, pp. 795-828.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Burford, G. (2005). 'Families: Their role as architects of civil society and social inclusion', *Practice*, 17, 79-88.
- Choy, J. (2005). *De vraag op het antwoord: Systemische interventies voor conflicten in organisaties*. Santpoort: NISTO.
- Dijkstra, S., Creemers, H. E., Asscher, J. J., Dekovic, M., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2016). The effectiveness of family group conferencing in youth care: A meta-analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 62, 100–10.
- Dozier, M., Lindhiem, O., Lewis, E., Bick, J., Bernard, K., & Peloso, E. (2009). Effects of a foster parent training program on young children's attachment behaviors: Preliminary evidence from a randomized clinical trial. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 26, 321–332.
- DuBois, D. L., & Neville, H. A. (1997). Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 3, 227-234.
- Erickson, L. D., McDonald, S., & Elder, G. H. (2009). Informal mentors and education: Complementary or compensatory resources? *Sociology of Education*, 82(4), 344-367. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/003804070908200403>.
- Everaert, H., & Peet, van, A. (2006). *Kwalitatief en kwantitatief onderzoek. [Qualitative and quantitative research]*. Utrecht: Hogeschool van Utrecht
- Fonagy, P., Luyten, P., Allison, E., & Campbell, C., (2017). What we have changed our minds about: Part 2. Borderline personality disorder, epistemic trust and the developmental significance of social communication. *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation*, 4(9), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40479-017-0062-8>
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20, 1408-1416.
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond*. New York: New York University Press
- Gergely G, Egyed K, & Kiraly I. (2007). On pedagogy. *Developmental Science*, 10, 139-146.
- Greeson, J., Thompson, A., Samira, A., & Wenger, R. S. (2015). It's good to know that you got somebody that's not going anywhere: Attitudes and beliefs of older youth in foster care about child welfare-based natural mentoring. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 48, 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2014.12.015.

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18, 59-82. doi:10.1177/1525822X05279903525822X05279903
- Harre, R., Moghaddam, F. H., Cairnie, T. P., Rothart, D. & Sabat, S. R. (2009) 'Recent advances in positioning theory', *Theory & Psychology*, 19, pp. 5-31.
- Hawkins, R., & Maurer, K. (2012). *Unravelling social capital: Disentangling a concept for social work*. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42, 353-370.
- Hurd, N. M., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2010). Natural mentors, mental health and risk behaviors: A longitudinal analysis of african american adolescents transitioning into adulthood. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1-2), 36-48. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9325-x.
- Keller, T. E. (2005). A systemic model of the youth mentoring intervention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 26, 169-188. doi:10.1007/s10935-005-1850-2
- Keller, T. E., & Blakeslee, J. E. (2013). Social network and mentoring. In Dubois, D. L., & Karcher, M. J. (Eds.). *Handbook of youth mentoring* (129-143). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications
- Kesselring, M., de Winter, M., van Yperen, T., & Lecluijze, S. (2016) 'Partners in parenting: An overview of the literature on parents' and nonparental adults' perspectives on shared responsibilities in childrearing', *Issues in Social Science*, 4(1), pp. 69-97.
- Kohn R., Saxena S., Levav I., & Saraceno B. (2004). The treatment gap in mental health care. *Bulletin World Health Organization*, 82: 858-66
- McConkey R., & Collins S. (2010). The role of support staff in promoting the social inclusion of persons with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 54, 691-700.
- McGorry P. D., Goldstone S. D., Parker A. G., Rickwood D. J., & Hickie I. B. (2004). Cultures for mental health care of young people: an Australian blueprint for reform. *Lancet Psychiatry*, 1, 559-68.
- Raposa, E.B., Dietz, N., & Rhodes, J.E. (2017). Trends in Volunteer Mentoring in the United States: Analysis of a Decade of Census Survey Data. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 1, 1-12. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12117.
- Raposa, E. B., Rhodes, J. E., Herrera, C. (2016). The impact of youth risk on mentoring relationship quality: Do mentor characteristics matter? *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 57(3-4), 320-329. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12057.
- Raposa, E. B., Stams, G. J. J. M., Card, N., Schwart, S., Burton, S., Sykes, I. Y., Kanchewa, S., Kupersmidt, J., Hussein, S., & Rhodes, J. (2018). The effects of youth mentoring programs: A meta-analysis of outcome studies. *Manuscript submitted for publication*.
- Reichheld, Frederick F. (2003), "The One Number You Need to Grow," *Harvard Business Review*, 81 (December), 46-54.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2002). *Stand by me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rhodes, J. E., Spencer, R., Keller, T. E., Liang, B., & Noam, G. (2006). A model for the influence of mentoring relationships on youth development. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(6), 691-707. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20124.
- Rickwood, D. J., Mazzer, K. R., & Telford, N. R. (2015). Social influences on seeking help from mental health services, in-person and online, during adolescence and young adulthood. *BMC Psychiatry*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12888-015-0429-6

- Schwartz, S. E. O., Rhodes, J. E., Spencer, R., & Grossman, J. B. (2013). Youth initiated mentoring: Investigating a new approach to working with vulnerable adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 52(1-2), 155-169. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9585-3.
- Schwartz, S. E. O., & Rhodes, J. E. (2016). From treatment to empowerment: New approaches to youth mentoring. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 58, 150-157. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12070.
- Shumaker, D.M., Deutsch, R. M., Brenninkmeyer, L. (2009). How do I connect? Attachment issues in adolescence. *Journal of Child Custody*. 6, 91-112. doi: 10.1080/15379410902894866.
- Spencer, R., Gowdy, G., Drew, A. L., & Rhodes, J. E. (2018). "Who Knows Me the Best and Can Encourage Me the Most?": Matching and Early Relationship Development in Youth-Initiated Mentoring Relationships with System-Involved Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 1-27. doi: 10.1177/0743558418755686.
- Spencer, R., Tugenberg, T., Ocean, M., Schwartz, S. E. O., & Rhodes, J. E. (2016). "Somebody who was on my side": A qualitative examination of youth initiated mentoring. *Youth & Society*, 48(3), 402-424. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0044118X13495053.
- Sperber D, Clement F, Heintz C, Mascaro O, Mercier H, Origgi G, & Wilson D. (2010). Epistemic vigilance. *Mind Language*, 25, 359-93
- Ungar, M. (2013) 'Resilience, trauma, context and culture', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 14(3), 253-64
- Van Dam, L., & Verhulst, S. (2016) *De JIM-aanpak. Het alternatief voor uithuisplaatsing van jongeren [The YIM approach. The alternative for the out-of-home placement of youth]*, Boom, Amsterdam.
- Van Dam, L., Neels, S., De Winter, M., Branje, S., Wijsbroek, S., Hutschemaekers, G., Dekker, A., Sekreve, A., Zwaanswijk, M., Wissink, I., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2017). Youth initiated mentors: Do they offer an alternative for out-of-home placement in youth care? *British Journal of Social Work*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx92.
- Van Dam, L., Smit, D., Wildschut, B., Branje, S. J. T., Rhodes, J. E., Assink, M., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2018). Does Natural Mentoring Matter? A Multilevel Meta-analysis on the Association between Natural Mentoring and Youth Outcomes. *Submitted manuscript*.
- Van Dijken, M.W., Stams, G.J.J.M. & de Winter, M. (2017). Children's experiences and perceptions of street culture, parental supervision, and parent mediation in an urban neighbourhood. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 45 (8), (pp. 999-1010) (11 p.).
- Van Dijken, M.W., Stams, Geert-Jan & de Winter, M. (2016). Can community based interventions prevent child maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 61, (pp. 149-158).
- Wilson D, & Sperber D. (2012). *Meaning and relevance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.