

The Youth Transitions Study (New Zealand):

Whāia to huanui kia toa

Chance and Sense of Self

Technical Report 26

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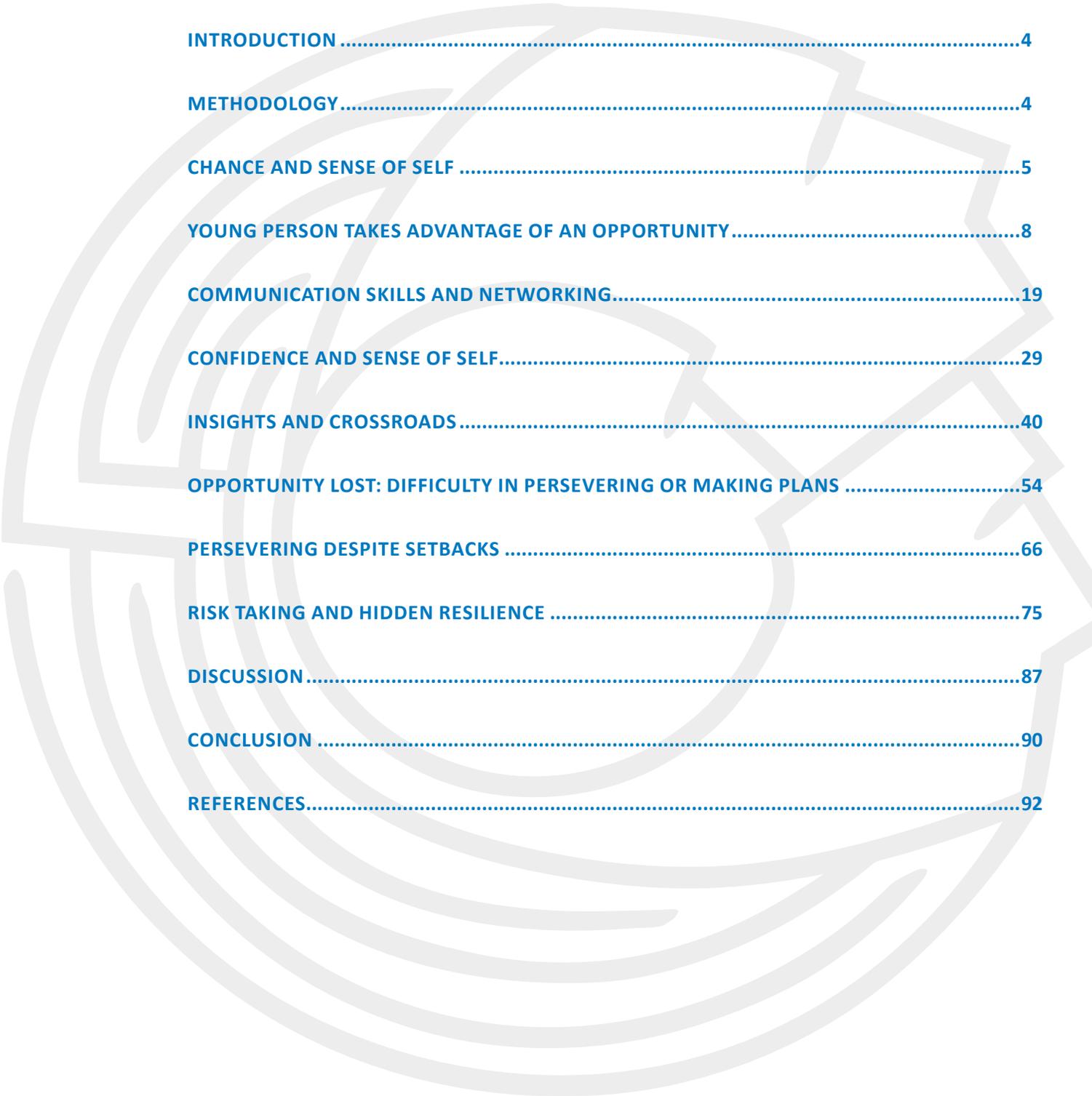
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Table of Contents



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	4
CHANCE AND SENSE OF SELF	5
YOUNG PERSON TAKES ADVANTAGE OF AN OPPORTUNITY	8
COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND NETWORKING	19
CONFIDENCE AND SENSE OF SELF	29
INSIGHTS AND CROSSROADS	40
OPPORTUNITY LOST: DIFFICULTY IN PERSEVERING OR MAKING PLANS	54
PERSEVERING DESPITE SETBACKS	66
RISK TAKING AND HIDDEN RESILIENCE	75
DISCUSSION	87
CONCLUSION	90
REFERENCES	92

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Introduction

The Youth Transitions Study is a longitudinal study of the transition to adulthood for young people who face high levels of risk during childhood and adolescence. The research was funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment between 2009 and 2019. In addition to tracking the transition process across time, the study also investigated the role of services and informal networks in supporting these transitions.

This report draws on the qualitative interviews and reports on one theme that emerged in the data analysis; the intersection between chance events and sense of self.

Methodology

The research programme involved:

- A survey administered to young people once a year for three years.
- Qualitative interviews with a subset of young people administered once a year for three years after completion of the three surveys.
- Qualitative interviews with an adult nominated by the young people as someone they trusted and whom they considered to know the most about them (Person Most Knowledgeable (PMK)).

In 2009, 593 young people were recruited into the study and took part in the first of three annual surveys. Following this, a subset of 107 youth were recruited into the qualitative phase and participated in three qualitative interviews. The research was approved by the University Ethics Committee. Both surveys and interviews were

administered by trained interviewers. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the qualitative interviews. These interviews included a range of questions covering life experiences, risks and resources, experiences of family, school and service experiences, community, relationships, and the young person's insights into what assisted them through their transitions. The young people were interviewed individually in a location of their choosing. The PMK also participated in three rounds of qualitative interviews.

Interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed verbatim, and coded using NVivo qualitative software. An initial set of thematic nodes was derived from the qualitative interviews and then a secondary analysis generated other themes. This report focuses on one of these themes: chance and sense of self; where chance events affected the young person's sense of self and identity. It draws on data from the qualitative interviews with young people, and corresponding interviews with their PMK where nominated.

Chance and Sense of Self

In this report chance is defined as: the things that happen which are unplanned but change the young person's life course or how they understand their experiences. For example, people who just turn up in young people's lives for good or bad, or being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time. Chance events or opportunities can have a considerable bearing on the young person's trajectory, altering their narrative and impacting their sense of self. The inner resources the young person is able to harness and their access or lack of access to external resources can significantly alter the outcome of chance events and opportunities.

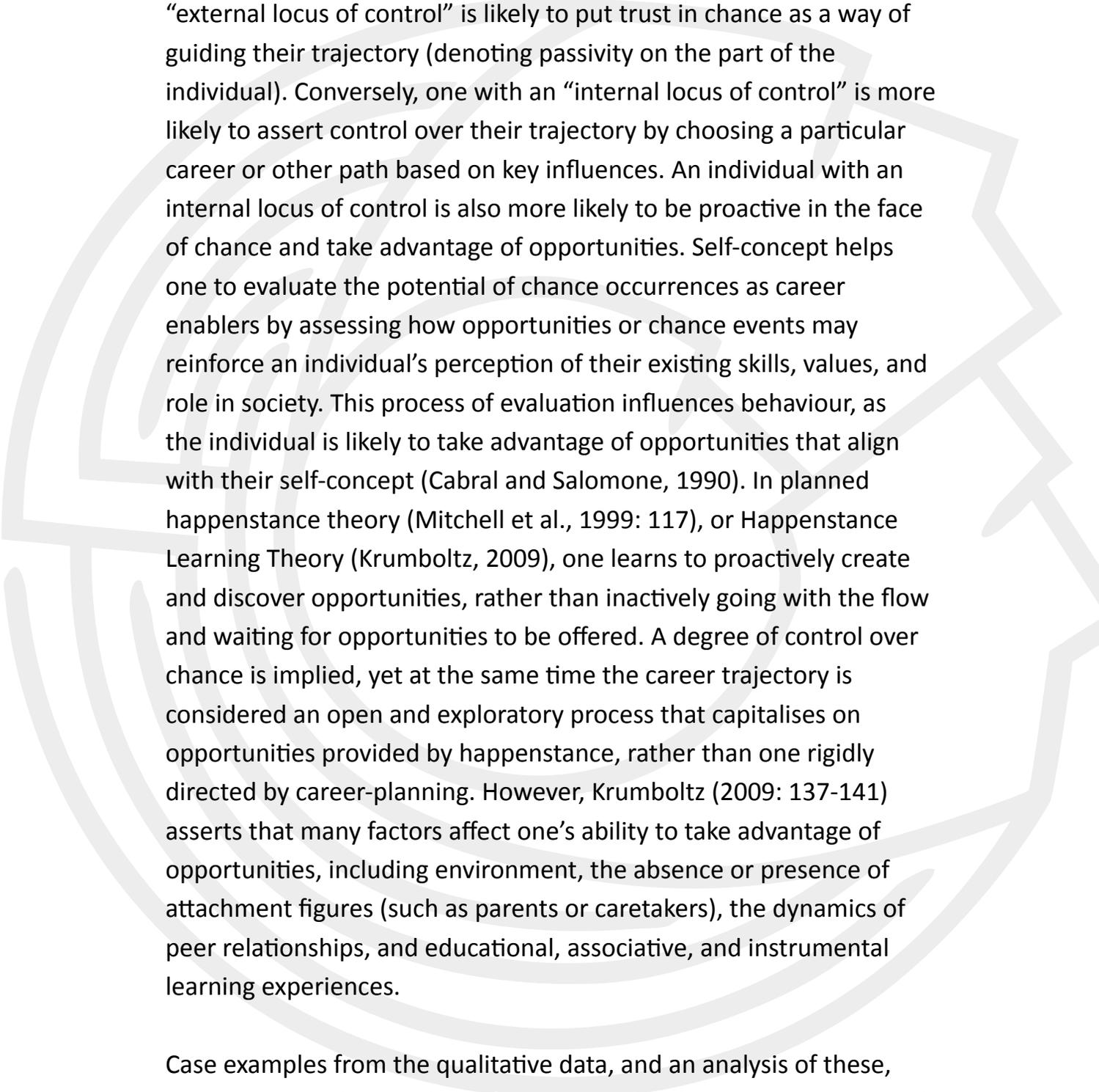
Several sub-themes emerged within this theme, as follows:

- Young Person Takes Advantage of an Opportunity
- Communication Skills and Networking
- Confidence and Sense of Self
- Insights and Crossroads
- Opportunity Lost: Difficulty Persevering or Making Plans
- Persevering Despite Setbacks
- Risk Taking and Hidden Resilience

This report is informed by Giddens' concept of the self as a "reflexive project" or project of the self (1991: 32). He proposes that self-identity, and the "fragile nature of the biography" an individual provides about themselves, are interconnected. An individual's identity is found in their ability to persevere with a particular narrative, a narrative which "cannot be wholly fictive" if one is to continue regularly interacting with others in daily life (1991: 54). It has been argued that Giddens' point of view may not sufficiently take into consideration that young people are "already living through the consequences of the decisions, or lack of decisions of others", instead painting them as "abstract individuals" showing personal agency and taking risks (Thomson et al., 2002: 338).

In this discussion there will also be reference to chance encounters, people who just turn up in young people's lives for good or bad, or, as defined by Bandura, "an unintended meeting of persons unfamiliar to each other" (1982: 748). There were examples in the study where a chance encounter or event initiated a turning point in the young person's life, or offered the young person a life-line or second chance which would not have been available to them otherwise due to their restricted access to material, social, and economic resources.

Cabral and Salomone (1990) suggest personality and self-concept



play a significant role in an individual's ability to recognise and take advantages of opportunities. They posit that an individual with an "external locus of control" is likely to put trust in chance as a way of guiding their trajectory (denoting passivity on the part of the individual). Conversely, one with an "internal locus of control" is more likely to assert control over their trajectory by choosing a particular career or other path based on key influences. An individual with an internal locus of control is also more likely to be proactive in the face of chance and take advantage of opportunities. Self-concept helps one to evaluate the potential of chance occurrences as career enablers by assessing how opportunities or chance events may reinforce an individual's perception of their existing skills, values, and role in society. This process of evaluation influences behaviour, as the individual is likely to take advantage of opportunities that align with their self-concept (Cabral and Salomone, 1990). In planned happenstance theory (Mitchell et al., 1999: 117), or Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2009), one learns to proactively create and discover opportunities, rather than inactively going with the flow and waiting for opportunities to be offered. A degree of control over chance is implied, yet at the same time the career trajectory is considered an open and exploratory process that capitalises on opportunities provided by happenstance, rather than one rigidly directed by career-planning. However, Krumboltz (2009: 137-141) asserts that many factors affect one's ability to take advantage of opportunities, including environment, the absence or presence of attachment figures (such as parents or caretakers), the dynamics of peer relationships, and educational, associative, and instrumental learning experiences.

Case examples from the qualitative data, and an analysis of these, present an insight into the different ways chance intercepted with self and identity in the narratives of young people. The following section will focus on references where young people took advantage

of chance opportunities, or where an ability to plan happenstance was evident. While the types of opportunities offered to young people varied, references primarily related to employment and educational opportunities.

Chance and Sense of Self

Young Person Takes Advantage of an Opportunity

The following discussion identifies the factors that facilitated or hindered young people's engagement with opportunities. While other people were often influential in directing their path, the young people also drew on their own insights, strengths, and skills to make the most of opportunities or learn from experiences when opportunities did not pan out as they had expected or hoped they would.

The most common examples of chance (identified in seventeen young person narratives and eight PMK interviews) were where a chance encounter, key worker, or other non-family relationship helped the young person to re-engage with education, continue their education, or provided the young person with the opportunity of starting a new educational course or job. Less common were examples where family (particularly extended family) or family connections facilitated employment opportunities for the young person (identified in ten young person narratives and two PMK interviews). The prevalence of examples where other people opened doors for the young person shows the importance of relationships in directing a young person's pathway.

Although in most cases it was a chance encounter or other relationship that opened up an opportunity for the young person, the young person's receptiveness and ability to follow through on opportunities was found to be a dynamic and critical part of this

process. According to Giddens (1991: 2), “the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences”. Given their circumstances, the young people in this study were at a significant disadvantage in achieving positive outcomes. Although inner strengths could play a vital role in changing the young person’s sense of self (Giddens, 1991), this occurred in combination with access to external resources, particularly supportive, pro-social relationships.

The young person introduced in the following case example, Ari, recalled that assistance from his youth worker occurred at a time when he was feeling ‘lost’. Had support not occurred at that particular time Ari believed he could have gone down a completely different path.

Ari

Ari was attending a course at the time of the Round One interview. He lived with his parents, but also spent a few nights a week staying with a sibling. He spoke of the importance of having a routine, which included school, the gym, and staying with his sibling. Here, movement and being on the move became a routine that kept him busy:

I don't like staying in one spot for too long coz I just make trouble – not trouble but start fidgeting and – messing up and stuff. That's why I like moving, on the move – on the move!

Ari stated that starting a course helped him stay out of trouble. This opportunity was reliant on the support of a youth worker, who encouraged Ari to re-engage with education by applying for the course on his behalf at a time when no other school would take him. Support from a youth worker who understood Ari’s situation, and such support occurring at an opportune time, were critical elements in changing his sense of self-worth:

The school called me up and asked me if I wanted to be in the [course] – and then I asked them who applied me for it and then they said, oh, your youth worker [...], and I was like, oh, thank you so much coz honestly that, like that week, I was thinking what was I going to do, was I going to be a drug dealer or something. Was I going to steal cars or something like that. But I knew what I really wanted to do was [name of career], that's what I really wanted to do. I was just lost for a bit.

Struggles with motivation, self-confidence, and self-belief were recurring issues in Ari's narrative, and these self-doubts related back to his perception that his family did not believe he was capable of achieving his goals. Ari's inner strength became apparent in his determination to remain on the course despite a lack of support from his family. His positive view of the educational environment and the support he received from peers and the course director contributed to Ari's resilience.

The course provided Ari with structure and routine and was closely aligned with his career aspirations, providing a positive alternative to riskier pathways. He felt motivated by peers and staff on the course:

Interviewer [...] do you ever feel like you need some – need help in general? With certain stuff?

Ari Yeah. Just motivating myself. Like I'm motivated by just a little more, like help to push me, to reach my potential – that's what I really need, that's why I love going to school, coz everyone's motivating everyone.

The supportive environment at school may not have had the power to substitute familial support, but it did help to build confidence in his ability to achieve his goals.

In Ari's narrative, lack of support from family meant he missed out on positive reinforcement from family recognising his achievements. In contrast, the following narrative introduces Ryan who found a sense of belonging in his new place of work through his relationships with family.

Ryan

Despite disrupted relationships with members of his immediate family, family was an important aspect of Ryan's narrative. He shared a strong connection with members of his extended family, and took on the role of provider for his partner and her children. This familial bond was strengthened when he was offered work through his family. Ryan was offered a more permanent position when he proved to be a hard worker:

Oh, I got [other family] that work there and they all said... like I have worked there before. Then I worked and then just didn't have a break, just worked the whole time and then they sorta said, you know 'You are a pretty good worker, do you want a job?'

His employer (Ryan's uncle) having expectations of him was mentioned as a motivating factor, and Ryan described himself as focussed and motivated in his job. Although it was not his dream job, working positively contributed to his sense of self-worth and wellbeing:

Coz I really love working. It's just so fun. Mind you, I'm used to it [...] You feel good about yourself coming home. Twelve hours work coming home. Boom... just love it.

Having positive relationships was an important factor in Ryan finding a sense of belonging in his work environment:

Interviewer [...] is this the job that you've always wanted?

Ryan Not what I've always wanted, but like right now it's pretty good. Like I'm very happy. It's not like my dream job but it's a pretty good job. Coz I'm working with family you know, like they teach you stuff. Teach you how to make it easier. You know, like they give you a good word. It's good, the people I work with are just so cool you know.

When talking about his plans for the future, Ryan was inspired by the business success of his employer (uncle) and was thinking about following a similar career pathway. His uncle had been an important presence in his life, encouraging him with his sports when he was younger. Ryan showed an appreciation of his uncle's knowledge and advice:

He's just cool, he's like the cool uncle you know. Like he would tell you what it is, how he feels. He'll tell you, if you can do it better he'll tell you how to do it better, that sort of thing.

A combination of internal and external resources contributed to Ryan finding stable employment. He was offered short-term work at a company through family connections, but it was his family observing his work ethic and seeing his potential which turned this into more permanent employment. A positive experience with his previous employer was also beneficial in adding to his self-confidence and sense of belonging in a work environment. However, longevity of employment was an issue for Ryan due to risk taking behaviour. In a later interview, Ryan lost his job and was out of work following an injury due to a drink-driving accident.

Similar to the experiences of Ryan and Ari, finding a place was a central theme in Selena's narrative. Her receptiveness to a potential

opportunity led to her finding a sense of belonging in an alternative education environment after years of feeling that 'school just wasn't me'.

Selena

Selena found mainstream education challenging and transitioned into alternative education before completing her first major school examination. Her initial experience in alternative education was not positive as Selena felt she naturally gravitated towards the 'bad people' on the course. The way the course was administered was also problematic for Selena. She found the strictness of the course and lack of consistency in the course values frustrating, wherein there were consequences for students breaking school rules but no consequences for tutors breaking the same rules, which made her want to rebel. Changing alternative education providers made a positive difference for Selena:

Interviewer Do you remember when you told me last time? You said to me...

Selena I'm hanging out with the wrong crowd.

Interviewer Yeah, that you, when you [changed alternative education providers] and you started to hang out with better people and met [your partner] that made it easier.

Selena Way easier. Yeah. Coz yeah. I would just sort of fit in with the bad people all the time, and I didn't know why. And then I realised it's because I'm one of them too. So I had to snap out of it. And once I have, life has been, you know, better.

While being in the right place at the right time enabled her to change alternative education providers, her receptiveness to the opportunity when it arose was also valuable:

Selena I met a friend who was going for a course [...] and the teacher came to her house to interview her and then I asked her if I could start the course as well.

Interviewer Great eh? Right place at the right time.

Selena Yeah. And that's how I got on that course. It was hard because there was like 20 other something people on the list and she chose me and my friend out of those 20 something people, so yeah. I guess it's when you actually try you get what you want.

Selena recalled that the staff were impressed as she was the first self-referral the school had ever had. She found the smaller class size beneficial, the peer network supportive and accepting of new students, and the tutors respectful of the students. The positive learning environment made it easier to focus on her studies and future plans. She also became aware of a shift in her sense of self-worth during this transition. The new course taught Selena that she could just be herself rather than worrying about 'being cool' or feeling pressured to live up to her reputation as a 'hard out gangsta'.

In Selena's narrative, chance, timing, her recognition of a potential opportunity, and her confidence in taking advantage of the opportunity culminated in a turning point that led to a positive education experience, facilitating a change in her sense of self and her attitude towards education.

Ari, Selena, and Ryan found a sense of belonging in their work and educational environments. Relationships were important in shaping their perceptions of particular work and education experiences as positive and also helped them to stay engaged in education and employment. Other young people had similar experiences and took advantage of opportunities which changed their life course.

Supportive relationships motivated young people to make changes. Encouragement and practical help and advice from a support person was a facilitative factor in helping young people realise their capabilities and find a sense of direction. Having support encouraged young people to keep going after a setback. One young person described feeling 'like a bum' when she lost her job, so was grateful for her key worker's help in applying for jobs and working with her on her CV.

A key worker who welcomed the young person into their family, introduced them to their family, or showed an interest in the young person's own family helped the young person to develop a trust-based relationship. Several young people described developing a strong relationship with their key worker who became 'like a mother', 'like a father', or 'like a family' to them.

Some young people felt that a chance encounter or work offered through personal networks allowed them to get around barriers such as a criminal record. One young person, Jake, who perceived drug-testing as a barrier to work felt frustrated as a previous job he had found through his personal network had helped him to cut back on his drug-use:

Yeah, if I had a job, I reckon I would stop, coz when I was working I did stop coz I was occupied so I didn't really need to get stoned. And life was good back then, so – I only got stoned for fun, every now and then, I think like once in the weekend and stuff like that, but I think now it's pretty ridiculous.

Someone taking a chance on them enabled young people to find accommodation after a period of transience or homelessness. Daniel accepted help from a chance encounter (a church youth leader) after being kicked out of home. He recalled that he became 'real tight'

with the youth leader who helped him to enrol in a course and offered accommodation. This outside support occurred at a time when Daniel felt alienated and isolated from his immediate family. By listening to Daniel, the youth leader helped him work through issues and come to an understanding of his situation. The time the youth leader gave to Daniel was particularly valuable:

Coz he understood, he was listening to me speak for about like 2 ½ hours, 2 hours, just telling him everything I was going through. I didn't expect that. I didn't expect him to care that much. And I just wanted to let it out. I just wanted someone to listen. Then he, he took it all in.

Several of the young people found that an opportunity of work or a chance to re-engage with education enabled them to substitute an unhelpful network or desist from risk taking behaviour (such as consumption of alcohol, drug use, or criminal activity) by keeping busy. For some of these young people this substitution was not without periods of relapse or falling back with the 'wrong crowd', but was helpful in that it showed them they could stay on track.

Other facilitative factors in helping the young person take advantage of an opportunity, or remain engaged with the opportunity included: opportunities which challenged the young person, helping them to see what they were capable of achieving; opportunities that reinforced positive coping strategies in the young person, or offered young people a positive outlet for their emotions (such as a young person who found that singing was an outlet for her emotions and took up the opportunity to sing in a band); opportunities that enabled the young person to help or be a positive role model for someone else (such as a young person who raised funds for a family member through a creative opportunity she was offered); opportunities where employment also assisted the young person to

gain qualifications (such as trade apprenticeships); family assisting with resources (which could be material resources or skilled assistance on a project); family connections or the positive reputation of the young person's family; and stability of accommodation.

There were several examples where the young person took advantage of an opportunity, yet the project, programme, course, or job was short-lived and had little impact on the young person's path, or did not lead to significant change. Despite this, young people tended to describe these experiences as having improved their lives for a short period of time. One young person, Jayna, recounted that it was about giving young people a chance to experience things, as was the case with work experience, which helped Jayna realise she was more suited to working outdoors than in an office.

Conversely, there were cases where the young person found it hard to remain engaged in a project, education opportunity, or job, and regarded the experience as unhelpful or dangerous. Examples of this included employment opportunities where work was sporadic or the work environment was unsafe, or where the young person felt taken advantage of by their employer, did not feel supported by their employer, felt powerless in resolving an employment dispute, or did not warm to their employer. One young person, Sean, who was unfairly dismissed by his employer, admitted a sense of powerlessness after his employer refused to pay him for the work he had done:

That's the way it goes eh as a young fella you can't really do much about it. You don't know any people high up like [name of politician] but you can't really ring him to complain about it. Not that he cares anyway.

A lack of material resources was another reason for opportunities

being short-lived, such as difficulties finding transport to and from work, work experience not leading to paid work, or a lack of resources or funds on the part of the employer.

Other instances of opportunities being cut short or the young person finding it hard to stay motivated, were: unplanned pregnancy, getting caught up in a crime, feeling unsupported or undermined by family, or disrupted familial relationships that interfered with work. Selena recalled how the strict rules at school only incited her rebellion. Another young person, Mason, who was offered the opportunity to exhibit his art in a public space, viewed the experience as a success and was proud of his achievement, but found his family's response frustrating:

Interviewer So it was cool to see your art in a public space?

Mason Yeah, my family was happy they came. Like I was good eh, then they came, and they're like [...] 'this is the right way to go, be good, hey be good', so another way, be bad, do the opposite. Aw telling me what to do. I just don't like them telling me what to do.

Although someone having expectations of the young person was found to be facilitative in many cases, there was a fine line between expectations and being told what to do. Young people responded well when they felt part of a decision-making process, while maintaining a sense of autonomy in their achievements or goal-setting. Relationships which were beneficial in this respect were those that enabled the young person to realise their potential through practical advice and support, rather than pressuring the young person to conform to others' expectations.

Relationships and a young person's inner resources (such as

self-confidence, communication skills, the ability to build social support, adeptness at recognising opportunities, determination, and perseverance) increased the likelihood that they would take advantage of opportunities.

Communication Skills and Networking

Communication and networking skills aided the young person to make the most of employment and education opportunities and to achieve their goals. Key strengths exhibited by young people that aided in the building of socially supportive relationships were: a tendency to recognise and take advantage of opportunities when they were offered; an openness to accept help from others; the ability to keep links with ex-caregivers, key workers, and previous employers; confidence or communication skills which enabled the young person to initiate contact with others in order to achieve their goals; and networking, where the young person recognised a chance encounter as a potential career contact.

Bandura (1982) posits that the amount of reciprocity present in social interactions is partially determined by an individual's inner resources and whether one exercises their ability to influence others. He likens a stronger sense of personal agency to a higher possibility of realising "valued futures". Similarly, inner resources such as communication skills and an ability to network and build social support are considered to be facilitative in influencing or asserting control over chance (Bandura, 1982; Cabral and Salomone, 1990; Mitchell et al., 1999). This section begins with three case examples where a young person's communication skills, social support building, or networking helped them to make good use of chance encounters or opportunities. The first case study introduces Jared, who found an apprenticeship in his field of interest through a combination of a chance encounter and his own resources.

Jared

Jared was one of many young people whose future goal was to pursue a trade but found it hard to find someone who would take them on as an apprentice. In Jared's narrative, rather than continuing to look for an apprenticeship, he instead began looking for work elsewhere and accepted a position offered by an employment agency. Although his new job was not related to his interests, the place of work happened to be right next to a workshop specialising in the trade he was interested in. From observing him at work, one of the tradesmen in the workshop took note of Jared's work ethic and enthusiastic nature, and offered him an apprenticeship:

Jared Well, the [workplace] was here and then the [trade workshop] was right here so they were pretty much connected as one and he said he'd been watching me for the last couple of months, showing that I'm a real – I don't know, he said I was a good worker and an enthusiastic person. He talked to some of the boys that I worked with and he said that they said that I was great to work around and stuff and – yeah, put my name forward to an apprenticeship.

Interviewer So you were kind of head hunted?

Jared Pretty much, yeah.

Interviewer Cool, and that sounds like it was more your attitude to the job than your amazing skill in [the job]

Jared Yeah, [my job] had nothing to do with [the trade workshop] and he said, yeah, this is not the job you want to be doing.

Jared's experiences could also be found in other young people's narratives, where the chance encounter, or someone in their personal network, observed the young person's work ethic prior to

offering them an opportunity. In Jared's case the chance encounter and the offer of an apprenticeship was a combination of 'luck', his own strengths, and his efforts in making the most of an opportunity.

Chance encounters can have a significant impact on a young person's life, and in some cases one chance encounter can be pivotal in facilitating multiple opportunities. Bobby's connection and ensuing friendship with a relief tutor on her course unlocked opportunities and resources that would not have otherwise been available to her.

Bobby

Bobby was removed from her mother's care at a young age. Although she felt resentment toward her mother for not being in a better position to care for her, when leaving CYF care Bobby hoped that she would be able to move back in with her. In order to do this, she needed to find employment or an educational course. A family member suggested a course and helped Bobby enrol on the condition that she attended class every day.

While at the course she met Miranda, a relief tutor, who was to become an important contact. Miranda stood out to Bobby because she listened and valued her ideas. She asked the class for their opinion on how their course could be improved, and involved the students in the process of finding ways to keep the course going when their funding was jeopardised, which validated the importance of the young people's voices.

On a personal level, Miranda's interactions with Bobby in class prompted her to have further contact with the young person, and in the interview Bobby refers to Miranda as her friend. Miranda saw Bobby's potential, encouraging and helping her to be involved in creative projects, which gave Bobby ideas to 'go forward in life' and

helped to build her self-confidence and nurture an exploratory attitude. Bobby recalled her involvement in a community project coordinated by Miranda and the potential benefits of being involved in such an initiative:

So it was pretty cool [...] just goes for one week, and it's one on one mentoring, like students with mentor and that mentor just teaches them [different skills] so young kids like how I was, can have that experience and that confidence and at the same time it's giving them ideas to go forward in life, yeah like... Miranda, she was the meanest [as in positive].

Another fortuitous moment for Bobby during the community project was meeting her mentor. After being paired up with her, she discovered the mentor was an old friend of the family. This connection created an immediate bond between the two of them:

I found out that she was [a family friend] so our bond – you know, faster and we got to connect faster than all the other kids, so when we did the [project], it was cool, like, it was pretty fun working with her.

This bond was strengthened by the mentor showing a sincere interest in Bobby's family and, in turn, introducing Bobby to her own partner and son.

Bobby's mother (PMK) agreed that Miranda was a positive, supportive influence for the young person, and she also affirmed Bobby's ability as someone who could initiate contact and accept help from others:

Miranda is a good impact on Bobby's life, she looks, Bobby looks up to Miranda and then when Bobby needs help and wants to

do something, she gets in contact with Miranda.

Although not all of the assistance offered by Miranda led to significant positive change for Bobby, she was an important facilitator and someone Bobby may never have met had she not followed the guidance of her family member and agreed to attend the course. Miranda helped Bobby to figure out what she needed to do in order to pursue her dream job, was aware of Bobby's skills, and encouraged her to utilise and strengthen her skillset through initiatives such as the community project. This relationship was pivotal for Bobby. It drew on Bobby's strengths – her ability to take advantage of an opportunity, initiate contact in order to move forward, and her strong communication skills. However, this relationship also exposed the vulnerability of the young person. Miranda filled a gap for Bobby where other relationships in Bobby's life were lacking by offering her access to resources and emotional support she would not have had otherwise.

Although moving back in with her mother and going to the course were initially positive turning points for Bobby (she credited this transition in helping her to stop some of her 'bad habits' and stay home), it preceded getting caught up in crime, and discontinuing the course when she became pregnant.

As seen in Bobby's and Jared's narratives, a chance encounter can be a positive turning point for a young person, even if only briefly. In other cases, such as Gemma's, opportunities were revealed through the networking and wider community engagement of the young person.

Gemma

While school was a challenging time for Gemma, being involved in an extracurricular activity opened up a job opportunity that became an

important resource for Gemma, not only materially, but also in terms of connections to positive and supportive relationships.

Gemma accepted a job offer looking after the children of Hannah who led the extracurricular programme. As a testament to her ability to build social support, Gemma worked for Hannah for five years. This relationship connected her with others in the community such as Jane, a friend of Hannah's who also offered Gemma the opportunity of paid work.

As her employee, the relationship Gemma built with Hannah and Hannah's family was positive, supportive, and familial:

Gemma *Yeah, so they just take me into their family basically, and that's how I feel, especially when I'm around them. They're always so warm and loving. It's great.*

Part of Gemma's self-sufficiency and ability to build relationships came from confidence in her own abilities as a caregiver (her dream job), and her strong communication skills. She actively networked within her community, met new people, and kept in touch with potential career contacts. This is a strong skill-set for a young person, but Gemma played down her inter-personal skills, describing her employment opportunities as 'luck' or 'coincidence':

Interviewer *So it was contacts?*

Gemma *And, yes it was. That's how I've met all the lovely people that I'm working for and have helped me in life really. Which is, I think it's like a bit of a coincidence thing that you just bump into them or come across them, and then things go from there.*

Gemma was adept at recognising and building pro-social relationships, and she also emphasised the importance of her labour being acknowledged and appreciated in her work relations:

Gemma I think they're a huge part of what's driven me to keep working for it, my career and making life good for myself and yeah. Um. Jane and Hannah both are extremely proactive and inspiring people. Especially Jane, she's so strong, especially with the children, and yeah, it's absolutely inspiring.

Interviewer Good parent.

Gemma Yeah and it makes me keep being driven to take care of, you know, when you see parents loving their children so much and they want somebody who's got the same passion about their kids to be taking care of them, which is, it makes me feel really good knowing that I'm appreciated in what I'm doing. It's not just kind of brushed off, and the parents are really interested in getting to know what their kids have been doing all day and what they're getting out of it and everything as well [...]

Speaking of a recent work opportunity (Gemma was just about to transition into this new job at the time of the Round One interview), Gemma said of her new employer:

Before she had even spoken with me, she had bumped into Jane and Hannah both, and that basically, straight, foot in the door straight away. And so, it's all been mainly word of mouth, my opportunities.

Gemma's partner (PMK) also affirmed this combination of chance

and hard work on the part of the young person when he talked about how the rapport Gemma built with a chance encounter helped her to find a job when she was looking for a change of employment, despite being younger and less qualified than other employees:

It's just all into her lap. Well not so much fallen into her lap, she's worked for it, but um, it was just, perfect.

The theme that resonated throughout Gemma's interview was the sense of community she cultivated through her networks. These relationships offered Gemma a sense of place and belonging outside of her biological family, who had not always been supportive, and reinforced her confidence in her abilities. Gemma also talked about the driving force behind her desire to succeed. She said that what propelled her was the desire to not let others down. She knew that she had built a good reputation for herself and therefore her community had high expectations. Gemma's strong communication skills, and ability to recognise and connect with pro-social people, made it possible for her to build and maintain a positive friendship with many of her employers as long as the dynamic was reciprocal.

Communication skills, an ability to build social support, and networking were identified as key strengths in the narratives of Bobby, Jared, and Gemma, which helped them transition into employment, maintain employment, and foster supportive relationships. These qualities were also found to be advantageous for other young people in the study who used their strengths in communication to navigate barriers and other challenges. In the case of Gemma, Jared, and Bobby, a combination of outside support, the young person's own strength, and their decision-making processes helped navigate barriers and other challenges. Positive personal networks, individuals, and chance encounters were pivotal in providing opportunities and opening up pathways that would

otherwise be inaccessible. The young person's ability to network, effectively communicate, or accept support from others were also important factors that aided them in taking advantage of opportunities or being receptive to chance encounters as potential future contacts:

Gemma *'It's not what you know, it's who you know' is definitely a big factor in life, I've come to learn. The more people you know that are willing to help you out, it's definitely the better.*

The access to alternative pathways could have been hindered or cut short by ineffective communication, resistance to accepting outside help or advice, low self-esteem, or a lack of confidence in taking advantage of opportunities when offered. When young people could accept support new opportunities opened up.

For example, Thomas, who had not learnt to read due to a disrupted educational pathway, was connected with a literacy tutor through his personal network. The young person's PMK, Dave, believed it was not an uncommon occurrence for others to offer the young person help, as the adults that met him 'all love him to bits'. In turn, the young person tended to be receptive to help where and when it was offered:

He doesn't mind taking the help you know what I mean, like. Yeah, he doesn't, he doesn't expect it but if it's offered he'll take it.

Young people who accepted opportunities often became more communicable, amiable, and sociable, due to the new relationships around them. The mother (PMK) of one young person talked about the 'unbelievable' change in her son, Cohen, from a 'rude' and

‘angry kid’ to a sociable and confident young person after he changed jobs. His new manager and employer recognised Cohen’s efforts and praised his work, a stark contrast from his previous employers.

Even when opportunities to make positive changes presented themselves, young people often continued to be blocked or diverted by factors outside of their control, or other internal conflicts.

Although communication, networking, and social-support building were helpful, they did not necessarily provide access to a hospitable or safe pathway, or assure successful outcomes.

There are also examples where strong communication skills or networking played a role in the young person being offered an opportunity, but the opportunity did not lead anywhere significant (e.g. work experience which did not lead to paid work). One young person, Milly, who showed strength in identifying opportunities and initiating contact in regards to education and employment, had trouble staying in jobs or finishing courses.

As can be seen in the experiences of Bobby and Gemma, whether a network, individual, or chance encounter has a significant positive impact on the young person’s life is often reliant on the rapport between this person, or group, and the young person. One young person, Siaki, met his tutor when the tutor visited Siaki’s class to advertise a different course offered by the same education provider. This prompted Siaki to enrol in the course being advertised. The guidance of his new tutor and the change of course were a turning point. There were qualities in his tutor to which Siaki responded well and he continued to maintain contact even after he finished the course. He described the tutor as ‘like another dad’ and ‘like another teenager, but in a father figure’; someone who offered him guidance and helped him to set goals:

He helped me choose the options and the path I wanted to walk, and he would help me make sure I'm going in the right direction.

Predominantly, young people in the study responded to chance encounters or individuals who: were respectful, seemed to understand young people, and took on a mentoring role offering constructive support and advice (the mother of one young person in the study talked about her son, Eben, connecting more with a male counsellor than a female because he needed a 'male push'); connected with the young person's family as well as the young person (as was the case with Bobby and her community project mentor); or, like the examples above, provided support that felt familial to the young person ('like a family', 'a father figure', etc.). Some young people, like Gemma, said it helped if these contacts had expectations of the young person. In these cases, not wanting to let others down often became a motivating factor, keeping them on track (though not necessarily for long periods of time) or steering them back on track when they started to get into trouble.

Communication skills, networking, and an ability to build social support are integrally linked to a young person's self-confidence.

Confidence and Sense of Self

This theme explores how chance encounters impact upon a young person's confidence and self-esteem. This includes: where the young person's recognition of their own strengths and skills aided them in taking advantage of opportunities; where the young person recognised an occurrence, chance encounter, or event as an opportunity and initiated contact, leading to an inner confidence; where chance encounters or other new relationships affected a young person's confidence in a positive or negative way; and where sudden illness, ill health, or a learning difficulty, such as the diagnosis

of a learning disability, affected confidence. In terms of the diagnosis of a learning disability, support or lack of support from services or education providers had an impact on outcomes for the young person.

Empowerment is considered an important aspect of youth development, community participation, individual health, wellbeing, and enhancement of self-esteem. A sense of personal agency, pro-social activity, proactive behaviour, and socio-political awareness facilitate psychological empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006: 32-33). Jennings et al. (2006: 42, 44) identified six key factors contributing to youth empowerment. Among these were the importance of a safe and supportive environment for youth, opportunities to build social support through meaningful participation, and reciprocity of power. As they developed confidence and power-sharing with adults, young people were able to practice leadership and decision-making skills. The following narrative introduces Eben, whose self-confidence was connected with the role models and mentors he sought out.

Eben

Eben had a physically and emotionally abusive upbringing. Perhaps due to the volatile nature of his relationships with his biological family, Eben had a tendency to search for a sense of belonging outside of the home, by seeking guidance and mentoring from adults he met through work and work experience.

Eben was adept at recognising the potential of chance encounters with adults who could be potential gate keepers to future success. Throughout the three rounds of qualitative interviews, Eben continued to seek out the guidance of adults associated with the industries he was interested in, many of whom were people he met by chance. Eben's ability to recognise chance encounters and other

contacts as people that may be able to open doors for him, and his willingness to initiate further contact, suggested an inner confidence and an exploratory attitude. In the young person's narrative, it was clear that the opportunities that had become available to him through these networks helped boost his confidence in his ability to achieve future goals.

Although opportunities did not always lead to expected outcomes, Eben demonstrated a skill in influencing chance in the initial stages of a new venture, and in maintaining contact with chance encounters related to his fields of interest. These could be interpreted as instances of planned happenstance, where he was acutely aware of how initiating contacts and building a network could help him achieve his goals.

Work-experience in a trade related to his interests enabled Eben to initiate further work experience in his dream job through someone who happened to visit the trade workshop. Eben contacted this person the following day to investigate the possibility of helping out at their place of work, and by the weekend had become a part of the team, an opportunity he perceived could facilitate his career plans:

Interviewer So do you think [work experience] will lead to opportunities in the future for you?

Eben Yes, definitely with, with every team I've worked on I've sorted better things, international starts, so yeah.

Interviewer Wow international, awesome. Do you see [working] with them in a very international industry?

Eben Yep.

Eben considered the team he worked with as supportive and 'like a family', which helped him to manage the stressful nature of the

fast-paced work.

Eben talked in more detail about how he consciously sought out networks in order to access opportunities related to his goals, rather than through training or qualifications, and how networking and his confidence in his abilities and strengths were interrelated:

Eben I have never had to, the only sort of education that I have had to do is [course] papers but that's open to anybody and I have always lived under the assumption it's not what you know it's who you know. You know the right people you'll do well.

Interviewer Right yeah. That's a good...

Eben I mean I have never had to, I don't, people are saying you need to do NCEA and you got to go do a degree all that sort of thing. Not for me, I am one of those people I can pick up jobs like that [clicks fingers], I can most [tradespeople] will go and do preparation training, I didn't, I did a couple of small things at [polytechnic] and that was about it, it didn't really count for much but I have a good retention of things. If I learnt something, if I get shown something, I would learn once, that's been way easy for me, I pick up anything so it's been easy.

Eben was adept at taking advantage of opportunities offered through his personal networks, and tended to gravitate toward relationships that offered practical support and mentoring. Over the three interviews, Eben's important relationships changed. His grandmother (PMK) noted the young person seemed to lose interest in his dream job as a viable career path after an unexpected outcome of a job lead. However, the role of his important relationships remained

unchanged. Those who helped him to find a place within the field related to his dream job were replaced with those who helped him further his career in a completely new field of interest. Again, Eben's self-confidence helped him to find and navigate these new networks. This also challenged the attitudes of those who had been unsupportive of him in the past:

It's about getting off your arse and finding the job yourself, talk to people, one of the biggest things that people can do is say 'no' and that's what I think, if you want something you know. For me I have always had people who have always been negative towards me, and that's something now I can say well you didn't think I was going to amount to much. [...] Yeah and that's one of the things, that's part of the reason why I like this job, I know that I am successful.

In a later interview, when an altercation with a family member became an unexpected barrier to returning to the family home, he turned to his work colleagues for support and advice. This included finding out who his work colleagues knew who might be able to help him. There was an element of chance in Eben meeting the right people who could help and guide him, but he also placed particular value on those relationships that could potentially facilitate his career goals, recognising what he needed from these relationships.

Eben seemed to find strength and confidence through work (and work experience) and his career mentors. Part of feeling good for him was showing those who had doubted his abilities in the past that he could achieve. For the young person in the next case example, Sian, 'perseverance is everything', and conquering her own self-doubts by persevering with study and goals helped her to feel good about herself. She admitted that she struggled with self-confidence, an attitude influenced considerably by her intimate relationships.

Sian

Sian described herself as being self-conscious and relying on alcohol to feel comfortable socially. Her susceptibility to the influence of her peers had led to her driving while under the influence of alcohol, crashing the car, and losing her licence. After this incident, the thought of driving again caused Sian anxiety and she was too afraid to get behind the wheel for fear she would cause an accident. She recalled that before she met her partner her lack of self-confidence also affected other areas of her life, such as applying for jobs.

Sian met her partner, Anaru, through a friend. After seeing him a few times by chance socially, he approached her on social media and they embarked on a relationship. Sian considered this as an unusual way for her to meet a partner. The new relationship was a significant turning point for Sian, and with Anaru she felt more confident and less self-conscious.

Although she continued to drink ('what I thought, was you couldn't have a good time without being drunk'), Sian was too afraid to drive for several months after crashing her car. With her partner's encouragement, Sian applied for and passed her learner license test. However, it was not until later, when Sian and Anaru were with family and ran out of supplies, that Anaru was able to convince Sian to get behind the wheel again:

Anaru was like 'come on babe this is your time like it's only down the road I will be in the passenger's seat with you, we can take it slow, like the farm road so you don't have to do like the speed limit', and yeah I managed to get to the shop in one piece and then I have been driving ever since.

The boost in confidence and self-esteem also enabled her to do

things that had previously been outside of her comfort zone, such as cutting back on alcohol at social gatherings, and looking for a job without relying on the assistance of someone else:

He made me bring out a side of me that I never knew was there like, I used to be quite a bad, very big drinker and I don't know, I sort of thought that, like that to me was a typical weekend, that's what was to be expected. Like he taught me to enjoy a weekend home [...], I don't know he made me a lot more, what do you call it? Not as self-conscious. I used to be real self-conscious about everything whereas now like I went out and looked for the job that I have got now, I went out and looked for it on my own, whereas my first job my mum basically did it for me [...] I like got a CV together, went into [place of work] like approached someone, and that's not like me, I was really self-conscious about that sort of stuff, but I am good now.

By the Round Three interview, Sian and Anaru were no longer in a relationship. Yet she talked about similar supportive qualities in her new partner. She was particularly appreciative of how her new partner, like Anaru, helped her to refrain from drinking.

Like Sian, Max's confidence was influenced by his close relationships. He had strong support from his parents and key worker, but the unsupportive relationship with his partner caused him anxiety and led him to doubt his abilities. When a chance traumatic event disrupted Max's pathway, these supportive adults helped him achieve a sense of normality.

Max

Throughout the three rounds of interviews, Max's confidence in himself and his abilities fluctuated according to the relationships he had around him, and what they thought of him. His partner in the

Round One interview was a predominantly unsupportive and emotionally abusive influence, knocking Max's confidence in himself. In contrast, his youth worker, Adam, became an important supportive influence. Adam's encouragement inspired Max to stay out of trouble. Max said it 'feels good' and 'gives me confidence' knowing that Adam considered him a good person. Max's most enduring supports over the course of the three interviews were his parents and his youth worker.

When Max was violently attacked by a group of men one night near his work, the people around him and his own perseverance aided his recovery. Prior to the attack, Max felt comfortable and safe walking around at night, but after the attack he no longer felt safe getting to and from work without a chaperone. His father and partner took on this support role, accompanying him to and from work. His mother (PMK) noted that this event occurred at a time when he was just starting to feel good about himself:

Now he's just gone back to work this week and my husband has gone in with him to just sit in the car so that, coz he's terrified and, it's just, he was just getting himself happy and another tragedy has happened to him, if you get what I mean.

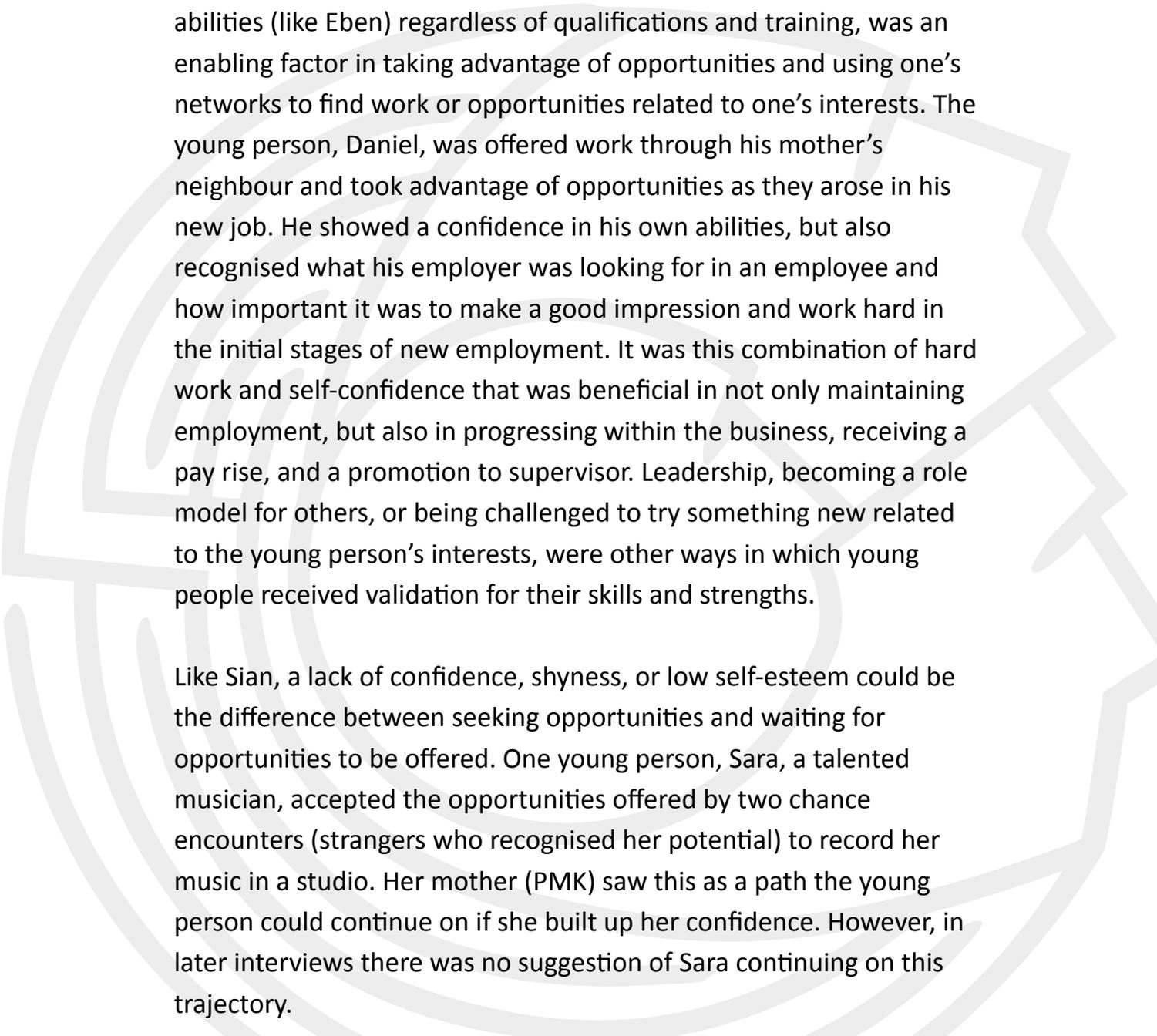
In terms of services, his mother was disappointed in the lack of follow up from the police regarding the attack (saying that the police inferred the young person had not been attacked at all, but rather had caused injury to himself). Max's youth worker, Adam, was someone Max felt comfortable talking to about the attack.

His mother described the lack of support from police as 'like he's been attacked again', believing it re-traumatised Max. Although the police were unhelpful at this time, Max pulled family and other supports around him so that he could feel safe and continue to go to

work. This is an example of where a negative chance event or unsupportive relationships can knock a young person's confidence, which may then be exacerbated by a lack of support from services or education providers. However, in Max's case, other supportive relationships and resources were drawn on to counteract these negative factors.

In Max, Sian, and Eben's narratives, their important relationships (some of which arose out of chance encounters) had a bearing on their sense of self, their confidence, their coping strategies when facing unexpected challenges, and their sense of wellbeing. Chance encounters or new relationships had a significant impact on Sian and Max's confidence and self-esteem, meaning their confidence fluctuated depending on the influence of those closest to them. Outside encouragement and support was an important facilitative factor, although some young people depended on this outside influence to feel good and take initiative. What proved helpful in these close relationships and what was shown to have a positive influence on a young person's confidence and self-esteem were: clear communication with the young person; encouragement and praise; recognition of the young person's strengths, skills, or improvement; inclusion of the young person in discussions about their education, goals, and future; the offer of opportunities that strengthened skills related to the young person's interests; and consistency.

What was unhelpful for young people was the negation of the supportive qualities described above: instability of relationships; inconsistency (i.e. a key worker who neglects to provide a young person with the resources they have promised them, or a mentor who intermittently ceases contact with the young person); lack of clarity in communication with the young person; and bullying or other abusive behaviour. There are examples, such as with Eben, where an unsupportive relationship could be a motivating factor for



the young person. Eben wanted to prove to those who expected him to fail that he could succeed. Showing confidence in one's skills and abilities (like Eben) regardless of qualifications and training, was an enabling factor in taking advantage of opportunities and using one's networks to find work or opportunities related to one's interests. The young person, Daniel, was offered work through his mother's neighbour and took advantage of opportunities as they arose in his new job. He showed a confidence in his own abilities, but also recognised what his employer was looking for in an employee and how important it was to make a good impression and work hard in the initial stages of new employment. It was this combination of hard work and self-confidence that was beneficial in not only maintaining employment, but also in progressing within the business, receiving a pay rise, and a promotion to supervisor. Leadership, becoming a role model for others, or being challenged to try something new related to the young person's interests, were other ways in which young people received validation for their skills and strengths.

Like Sian, a lack of confidence, shyness, or low self-esteem could be the difference between seeking opportunities and waiting for opportunities to be offered. One young person, Sara, a talented musician, accepted the opportunities offered by two chance encounters (strangers who recognised her potential) to record her music in a studio. Her mother (PMK) saw this as a path the young person could continue on if she built up her confidence. However, in later interviews there was no suggestion of Sara continuing on this trajectory.

Sara also experienced disruption to her educational pathway due to an undiagnosed learning disorder. A chance discussion about the learning disorder of a family friend led Sara's mother to seek further help for her daughter. Following this conversation, she took her daughter to the doctor, who diagnosed the young person with

the same condition. This serendipitous conversation could have been a positive turning point for the young person had she then been provided with support and resources to facilitate her learning. This, in turn, had the potential to improve her confidence in her abilities and may have made it easier for her to attend the classes she was struggling with. Unfortunately her teacher and school were unsupportive of her needs. Prior to the diagnosis, the young person had been truant and feigning illness to avoid going to class, and her attendance continued to decline after the diagnosis:

Interviewer We were talking about how you kind of left school, you said you were embarrassed, you ended up wagging, you were going to school stoned sometimes, and it wasn't that you didn't like school necessarily, it's just you weren't feeling successful, it sounds like?

Sara Yeah, very unsuccessful, embarrassed, just didn't want to be there, I mean, I did like some things about it, like I said the [hands-on] classes, that was about it. Anything pen on paper I just hated it, I was so embarrassed.

Sara's educational pathway improved when she transitioned from mainstream education to alternative education, as her tutor took her needs seriously and made sure she had access to the necessary learning resources and support.

Personal resources in the form of confidence and self-esteem can affect, or be affected by, chance encounters or events. Chance encounters which provide mentoring and other positive support can boost the young person's confidence enabling them to do things that would otherwise be outside of their comfort zone. Assistance from education providers and services when the young person is faced

with a chance event or turning point can impact on the young person's sense of wellbeing. Sharing insights into these experiences and turning points was one way the young person developed a sense of identity. As will be seen in the following section, young people found a way to make sense of the world around them and where they fitted in.

Insights and Crossroads

This section explores the reflexive insights of young people. This includes: young people learning something from or developing a viewpoint because of a chance experience or event, and chance events or encounters representing pivotal turning points that change young people's attitudes, behaviours, and pathways.

Giddens (1991: 112-3) identifies a turning point as a "fateful moment", a moment which arises from circumstances or events which are "highly consequential and problematic". The decisions the individual makes when faced with a "fateful moment" have a considerable bearing on their ambitions or future path. Examples of "fateful moments" (Giddens, 1991) include those where the individual has some control over their pathway, such as embarking on a particular course of study or deciding to start a business, and those directed by chance, such as winning the lottery.

Many of the young people experienced a chance event or encounter when they were trying to stay on track and out of trouble, prompting them to make a decision about which path to take. This then represented a fork in the road, where the young person saw before them two distinct paths. It could also act as a wake-up call, opening the young person's eyes and prompting them to make changes or turn their life around. In all of these examples, the young person showed an amount of personal agency in light of unexpected

change or new information.

Some young people experienced a chance encounter or event as a negative turning point, marking the beginning of involvement in criminal activity, or an escalation in criminal or potentially harmful behaviour. Several young people, reported that a positive chance opportunity (usually the offer of employment) helped them gain insight into their self and identity; that is, who they wanted to be, how they saw themselves, which direction to go in, and what would be helpful for them in the future.

Several young people reported that a positive service or education experience helped them reflect on their situation and make changes. The timing of a chance encounter or event was also critical for some of the young people as it occurred at a time when they were ready to accept and make changes.

The next section introduces Andy, who recounted that he could not see a way out of his involvement with drugs and crime. Two turning points were instrumental in changing his trajectory, offering him an alternative to this lifestyle and the opportunity to embark on a less dangerous life project and a project of the self (Giddens, 1991; Munford and Sanders, 2014: 13).

Andy

At the time of the Round One interview, Andy was working full-time, the father of two children, and engaged to his partner (the mother of his children). However, a few years prior to the interview, Andy was heavily involved in drugs (his main source of income) and never foresaw himself settling down with a serious partner, children, and stable employment. There were two significant turning points which opened Andy's eyes, prompting him to make changes and turn his life around.

The first wake-up call occurred when he was among those injured in a fatal assault related to his criminal network around the age of 14:

Interviewer Why did you say you didn't think you'd be here?

Andy Since – I was too deep – into the drug thing – that's just what I was good at doing, and I thought I couldn't do anything else, like, I didn't think I could have my own family and work. I thought that was life, you know, getting money – yeah, just - I was just happy, I ran my boys, doing what we were doing – I didn't think, I didn't even picture this happening, you know what I mean?

Rather than the injury deterring Andy from criminal activity entirely, it slowed him down and made him think differently about his lifestyle. In this moment Andy saw the path ahead and the potential fatal consequences of his actions if he continued on the same trajectory.

After discovering his partner was pregnant, Andy stopped offending completely, as he was concerned about his child growing up without a father. This turning point took place at a time when Andy had already begun to make changes, but prompted him to make a decision about which path to take:

I didn't want to rely on [criminal activity] for income, like there was heaps but I was looking like, one day you're going to get caught and I'm going to be back where I was, and then my kid will have no daddy, and I was looking at it like that, plus I didn't want my kid to be around that kind of stuff.

Andy's mother had been instrumental in encouraging Andy to continue with education after leaving high school, and returning to

education coincided with his partner's unplanned pregnancy. Andy completed courses in two trades, one of which led straight into paid employment. Becoming a father and taking on parenting responsibilities was a major turning point for Andy, motivating him to stay on track and out of trouble.

Although embarking on an alternative project of the self was a gradual process for Andy, he had the support of his family, qualifications from his trade courses, employment and income, and a strong cultural connection, which facilitated enduring positive change and enabled him to find a new way of being. Andy's narrative differed from many of the young people in the study, where they showed a desire to make positive change and take steps to forge this new path, but where they also lacked the supports and resources to make the changes long-term.

The barriers to maintaining enduring positive change, despite a desire to do so, can be seen in the narrative of Matai, where he needed to move to another town in order to counteract the unhelpful influence of his peer network.

Matai

There were a number of events related to chance that had an influence on Matai's trajectory. Although he learnt from each of these events, his peer network (which encouraged his consumption of alcohol, drug use, and gang involvement), made it difficult to stay on track or follow through with the positive changes he wanted to make.

Matai went on the run from police after being arrested for an assault he believed was not entirely his fault. With a warrant out for his arrest, Matai managed to stay in hiding for almost a year before being caught.

Chance played a role in his eventual arrest, as Matai believed he would not have been caught if it had not been for the interference of one of his peers. However, Matai admitted he was relieved with the outcome, as evading the police was starting to take a toll on his mental health:

Interviewer You were actually hiding, hiding in houses and not going out?

Matai Yeah that's what I was doing for about a year. I was getting paranoid as, the police, I started having bad dreams like every night.

Interviewer Oh my gosh.

Matai Yeah, yeah woke up sweating and that and then when I got, when they finally caught me I was pretty happy about that.

Interviewer Yeah?

Matai I don't have to worry about looking over my shoulder 24/7.

Although the original action (the assault) that sparked an escalation in non-normative behaviour (going on the run from police) was negative, reflecting on this experience, Matai saw the positive in this turning point. When asked if he could go back and change anything, he said he would not change going to jail:

Can't change about the jail because that was the best thing. It was a good thing in the end even though it was a bad experience for a person. Yeah.

His experience in jail taught him that he did not want to continue offending. Part of this change in attitude was also due to the transition from Youth Court to District Court, resulting in more severe consequences for his actions.

At the time of the Round One interview, Matai was on home detention after being released from prison. He felt confident that he would not breach his conditions, and was focussed on getting out of the Justice system – ‘I don’t want it in my life anymore.’ When a friend offered Matai a job, he saw this opportunity as a chance for a better life, a transition that would allow him to go in a new direction and put his past behind him. The offer of employment occurred at a time when Matai was ready to make changes. However, following the Round One interview, Matai went back to jail briefly for breaching his release conditions, and his peer network made it hard to stop drinking and stay out of trouble. It was the move to another town to be with a woman he met while on the run, and becoming a father, that helped him to turn things around.

Matai’s transition to a more positive sense of self was not linear. Breaching conditions of home detention and the influence of negative peer networks and other unhelpful relationships were common stumbling blocks for young people. The next case example introduces Lani, who recalled that her relationship with her partner was a turning point that negatively impacted her education pathway, relationships with friends, and her sense of wellbeing.

Lani

Lani felt her best year of school was her last year of intermediate, as this was the year she came out of her shell and before then she was very shy. Her first year of high school started positively. She said she was close to her classmates as they were ‘like brothers and sisters’ to her. Towards the end of the year she met an older boy who she started dating. This new relationship had a negative impact on her friendships and studies. In retrospect, she described her partner as ‘the most possessive person I’ve ever met’, ‘gross’, and ‘crazy’. Although he was possessive and controlling towards Lani, she discovered that he was also seeing

other girls, including one of her close friends, resulting in a breakdown of communication between Lani and her friends. She recalled that 'all my mates turned on me and I had no mates'. Reflecting on this turning point, Lani said meeting her partner was one of her deepest regrets:

Interviewer Ok, so looking back is there anything about high school you would have done differently, is there any different decisions you would have made?

Lani Um. I think just, just not meeting him. That's the biggest regret coz that interfered with school as well. I'd not go then I would go. I was unhappy, I fell pregnant.

Lani chose not to tell her family when she found out she was pregnant. What did help at this time was talking to one of her teachers about the pregnancy. Her teacher booked her an appointment with a nurse when Lani told her she was too young to keep the baby. With little outside support and the breakdown of her peer relationships, the support of her teacher and the counselling that the teacher organised was critical. Lani referred to the year she broke up with her partner as 'a recovery' year, and the year after that as 'the best year of my life' because she was happy again and single. For Lani, meeting her partner occurred at a time when she was doing well at school, felt good about herself, and had positive relationships with her peers. Her new partner interfered with this positive trajectory, negatively impacting on her friendships and education. Lani's story shared similarities with the narratives of Matai and Andy in that it showed how susceptible young people were to the influence of close relationships. For example, Andy and Matai had been involved for some time with a negative network and were active participants in these networks. The fateful moment in Andy's narrative was a wake-up call which immediately sparked a change in

attitude and behaviour. Matai gained insight when he was on the run from the police, realising he wanted a different life and no longer wanted to be in the Justice system. This change in attitude was reinforced by going to jail. He saw the possibility of a different life when an old friend offered him employment out of the blue. But the unhelpful influence of his peer network made it difficult to sustain positive change.

Timing was often a crucial element for young people. An offer of employment occurred at a time when Matai was trying to make positive changes. Although the job did not eventuate, it did give him hope that there were alternative paths he could take. Xavier was offered a second chance (diversion) after being arrested following a police car chase. Through the Youth Court, Xavier was referred to a mentoring programme. His mentor helped him to stay out of trouble and find employment. Xavier said that it was the timing of the chance encounter with his mentor that made the difference when his parents and family had been unable to get through to him:

Interviewer And [the mentor] just happened to come in at the right time when you'd kinda experienced all of that, and, you know, learnt all these massive life lessons, and then he just came in the right time and was kind of the man that helped you.

Xavier That helped, that helped me out to get it, to get the job.

Interviewer And how did this make a difference in your life? Do you reckon that you'd be getting into trouble if that hadn't, if he didn't do that?

Xavier Yeah, I reckon I would have been into getting back into trouble if I didn't have the work.

Interviewer So if he didn't get you into work, you'd be kind of like finished?

Xavier Yeah, I would like, I wouldn't, I wouldn't have that like um faith of still doing my [trade].

Interviewer So you still wouldn't have, you wouldn't have that focus?

Xavier Yeah, like I wouldn't have that focus that I always wanted to be a [tradesperson] and that.

Interviewer Yeah. Why do you think you wouldn't have that focus?

Xavier Like I would be busy hanging around the street with my mates.

While the change immediately involved at a turning point may feel insignificant it can have lasting effects. For example, Jayna, who gained employment on a farm through her personal networks, realised that she was not suited for working in an office. Although a relatively small self-realisation, knowing this had an ongoing influence on her career aspirations:

Interviewer So that was the first time you worked on a farm and that and you suddenly thought 'I love this'.

Jayna I got a taste for it and I kind of felt like I did, I did like working out in the open though. I realised I was better, I wasn't good behind the computer, I was shit at that. I'm better working outside, and that's when I realised.

In the narratives of Lani, Matai, and Andy there were distinct points where two potential pathways were evident. If Andy had not been injured, would his risk taking and criminal behaviour have continued to escalate? If Lani had not met her partner, would her educational pathway have been different? If Matai had not breached the conditions of his home detention, would he have taken advantage of his friend's offer of employment? Although turning points often

incite a desire in the young person to make changes, the relationships surrounding the young person, and their access, or lack of access to support and resources can be the difference between the young person being able to put those changes into place or falling back into unhelpful patterns of behaviour (i.e. negative influence outweighed the positive for Matai) or coping with challenges (i.e. when Lani discovered she was pregnant, her teacher was her only support).

Young people reported that if an opportunity presented itself at a time when they were ready to make changes then negative influences may be resisted. For example, Keone was offered a job through his uncle and he said that taking this job created the opportunity for him to 'grow up' and also enabled him to distance himself from his peer group:

The role it's playing? It's showing me, like, how to become a normal, what is it, how to become a man, like mature enough, like grow up, yeah, instead of like still stuck out here with my friends, still thinking I am a man when really I'm not – yeah, it's really showing me, another thing as well – like I have become mature, now it's like, it's hard to put in words.

Neighbourhood, familial relationships, and other environmental factors can make it hard for young people to abstain from committing crime, or such factors can be facilitative. Andy had negative influences in his peer network, but his strong connection to his culture, his family, his partner, and his partner's family, helped him to desist from offending when he became a parent. Alternatively, it can be the young person's coping strategies that make it hard to make changes. When Sean's mother was diagnosed with a fatal disease, he tried to give up drugs because he wanted to do something that would make his mother proud. What complicated this plan was that Sean had been using drugs as a way of coping with the

stress of finding out about his mother's condition:

She's probably only got a couple or few years you know. That's what pisses me off the most; everyone thinks it's a big joke but really you think oh nah it's a big joke just coz you smoke weed but why do you smoke weed. Oh maybe coz your mother's dying and your dad don't give a fuck about you, you know. People just don't care. They don't see the, you know, the deep side of things and that's what's made it harder for me but it's made it easier as well. Coz of the fact that my mother's dying, I want to see her happy when she goes out you know not sad 'oh my son's a druggie'.

Conversely, when a young person realises they want to make changes, a combination of positive environmental factors and personal resources can successfully facilitate change. Dominic believed that being sent to a rehabilitation facility gave him the time to reflect on his behaviour and helped him to 'think differently about everything'. When he left the facility his key worker assisted him in finding a family to live with. Dominic said having a good key worker was 'just pure luck' and there was also an element of chance in finding a suitable place to board. He formed a strong bond with the family who took him in. What helped Dominic turn things around was the support of his key worker, a positive service experience at the rehabilitation facility, the stability of the family he boarded with, and his own will to change:

Dominic The biggest asset to changing your life is finding a new place, like a different town somewhere else and just start from scratch. I mean just choosing to be a different person.

Interviewer Which is what you did, and you think [the rehabilitation programme] helped give you that

reflection time to do that.

Dominic Ah yeah they helped, they just helped me, I don't know to think differently about everything.

Interviewer Coz do you think if you went back to [your home town] you wouldn't have changed.

Dominic Nah, I would have relapsed and just been doing nothing. I would have got kicked out of school there, oh man that school had beef with me, yeah this school's alright. And the people there as well, I would have just crept back with the same crowd coz it's such a small town.

In Lani and Matai's narratives, chance was tied up with feelings of regret. There were other examples of this, particularly where a young person saw in hindsight the negative impact a relationship had on them. Although there was often an element of regret in the narratives, it was common for the young person to say they would change little if they could go back. They said that the turning points enabled them to learn valuable lessons about themselves and others.

Unplanned parenthood, or the sudden loss of a close relationship, often preceded a period of self-reflection and a change in behaviour. Andy had made some positive changes prior to becoming a parent, but it was parenthood that motivated him to stay on track and out of trouble. His qualifications, employment, familial support, strong cultural connections, and the positive influence of his partner, helped facilitate and sustain these changes.

The loss of a close relationship can also bring about a sudden change in behaviour or attitude. For example, Ariana, said she was going to counselling for a long time, but this did not help her abstain from self-harm. However, after her friend passed away unexpectedly, she stopped self-harming

immediately:

So it took for me to lose someone for me to realise things.

On the other hand, for some young people the loss of a relationship was a catalyst for an increase in antisocial behaviour, and then over time this acted as a facilitator of more positive change. Daniel's behaviour, for example, changed after his father passed away. He described behaving like a 'bloody animal', not caring about the repercussions of his actions, and becoming violent towards other family members, leading to the disintegration of his relationship with his immediate family and being kicked out of home. Despite this initial negative downward spiral, thinking about his father motivated him to make positive changes later on:

Interviewer Where did that, when you're thinking to yourself, I mean, I've gotta stop stealing, I've gotta stop smoking and I can't afford it, you know, whose voice was that, needling in your head? Whose wisdom? Where did it come from?

Daniel From my dad, like oh you know, like I had to, like I would think, like oh, I know what I'm doing is bad, when I'm doing something bad I know it's bad, coz sometimes I get those, get that feeling like I can't forget about it. Like I try to forget about it, like yeah I stole this, yeah just squash it, let's steal something else. Then again I'm like, it's staying in my mind, I used to think, oh crap. I stole, yeah, I stole it but why am I still talking about it, I've already got it. And then it's like, oh, I end up thinking about my dad, like, him telling me as if he was there.

Several of the young people reported that past experiences became a trigger for their subsequent reactions to events and to people. Levi was adopted, but the adoption fell through unexpectedly when his adoptive mother discovered she was pregnant. Following this experience, and another failed foster placement, Levi decided he did not want to be adopted. His caregiver (PMK) explained that when the placement did not work out it reinforced Levi's feelings of rejection by his birth parents. What aided Levi to trust again was the support of his key caregiver at a residential facility (PMK). Despite Levi's aversion to being adopted, his caregiver took on a fatherly role and Levi felt 'basically' adopted and accepted into the caregiver's family.

Injury, illness, or loss of a close relationship also played an important role in the life course of several of the young people. For instance, the death of a grandparent motivated some of the young people to make a conscious effort to change unhelpful patterns of behaviour. In other cases the death of a key person led to non-normative ways of coping, such as alcohol and drug use as a means of dealing with stress, which, in turn, led to a downward spiral of offending or the intensification of substance abuse. Chance encounters and/or events intersecting in a young person's life were common. For example, Andy's injury planted the seeds of change, but it was fatherhood which motivated him to make a long term commitment to these changes. A young person may cope quite differently when faced with different types of happenstance.

In Matai's narrative, a chance job offer gave him hope that he could change his direction, but this change was delayed when he failed to find work. Chance encounters and events do not always eventuate in opportunities being realised, or in significant change for the young person, as will be discussed in the next section.

Opportunity Lost: Difficulty in Persevering or Making Plans

Young people experience many chance events and encounters that have the potential to alter their life course, but that ultimately do not do so. This section discusses the theme of lost opportunities, challenges in delaying gratification, or difficulty persevering with goals or making plans.

The actions, influence, and role modelling of other people were found to have a significant impact on young people's ability to take advantage of opportunities, stay in education, employment, or persevere with goals. The data pointed to the significant role that social capital played in enabling a young person to navigate complex environments. Whiting and Harper (2003: 1) identified the following key factors as contributors to social capital: participation in one's social world and the wider community; social and supportive networks; quality of relationships (i.e. access to trusting and mutually beneficial relationships); and the individual's attitudes to their local area. Social capital in the form of a sense of belonging and connection within family and the wider community (Barn, 2010: 842) is considered to be integral in facilitating a young person's capacity to exercise agency (Hancock, 2009; Munford and Sanders, 2015).

The formation of a sense of agency is one of three key factors identified as being important in the process of identity formation in young people, along with the opportunity to "test out" different identities, and the presence of enduring, supportive relationships (Munford and Sanders, 2015). For many of the young people in the study who could not rely on their biological family to provide secure and stable support, somebody else in the community took on this role, such as a key worker or caregiver. In order for this relationship to have a significant positive impact, it was necessary that they remain connected to the young person when they faced challenges and

setbacks. Supportive relationships had the power to counteract barriers to goals and opportunities.

Parenthood can be a positive turning point for young people, both male and female, motivating them to stop offending and discontinue, or cut back on drug and alcohol use. Although there were young men in the study who found it difficult to have regular contact with their children due to tense relationships with the child's mother, or who chose not to be involved for other reasons (e.g. gang involvement, drugs, or a lack of material resources), some found stable employment and embraced the role of fatherhood. For young mothers taking care of their child tended to take priority over employment. There were young women who balanced employment or education with parenting, but without sufficient support (i.e. family members who shared the responsibility of childcare) and limited material resources. Young males were more likely to look for a job in order to provide financial support, rather than further their education, after becoming a father.

Unplanned parenthood can have different outcomes depending on the circumstances of the young person. For some young people, parenthood was a motivating factor to fast-track future plans (particularly in the narratives of young fathers). Conversely, for young women like Tessa, pregnancy and parenthood made it harder to persevere with future plans in education or employment due to a lack of support and resources.

Tessa

At the time of the Round One interview, Tessa was living with her parents and caring for her son. The father of her son had recently left her and Tessa worried about her son growing up without his father. As a single parent, Tessa was grateful for the support of her mother.

Although Tessa felt close to her mother, she said the bond with her mother and siblings was a recent development. She puts this difficulty in forming a bond with her immediate family down to being moved around between family members while growing up. Her siblings had a more stable upbringing.

Prior to becoming a parent, Tessa was enrolled in a hospitality course, but discontinued study after discovering she was pregnant with her son. She was still interested in hospitality, and at the time of the Round One interview she was thinking of enrolling in the course again in the near future. She had a backup plan in case hospitality did not work out. However, her study plans needed to work in with her parental responsibilities and were dependent on her mother's support:

Um, I was thinking about going back to do that. But it's all up to my mum, whether she can look after my son or not. If I do get a job with [hospitality]. If I can't do that, then I'll do [a course unrelated to hospitality]. Yeah, and just see where that gets me.

Had she finished the course, and not become pregnant, Tessa believed she could have secured employment through a family member she still considered to be a potential work contact:

Tessa One of his mates own one of the [businesses] in town. And if I had of finished [the hospitality course], I was going to get a job there. Because I had my son I could not do anything... so it's like, oh it's alright...after he gets older and goes to [preschool] then...

Interviewer Yeah. So you've...

Tessa I will try for it again. (Laughs)

Interviewer And go back to that contact you have?

Tessa Yeah.

In later interviews, Tessa did not follow through on her educational plans. In the Round Two interview she said she would prefer to find work rather than enrol in a course. She had hopes a job would come up at a childcare centre which could mean working towards a qualification on the job, but admitted she had not been looking for work, as being a mother and her volatile relationship with her partner and his family – ‘There is too much drugs, alcohol, violence around’ - had left her exhausted:

Tessa I haven't been looking [for a job] coz I'm fed up with everything and I'm very tired and I'm –

Interviewer So the tiredness?

Tessa The tiredness is like, you know, all the drama, all the arguing.

Interviewer So that actually takes up your energy?

Tessa Yeah. And then my son.

In her Round Three interview, Tessa reported that she had a chance to work at her son's childcare centre but stopped after a few weeks as she found it difficult to mind the other children with her son vying for her attention. Tessa's story shows that in the long term motherhood can be a barrier to pursuing or achieving goals, especially when young people receive little support from others in their network.

The following case example introduces Jake who, like Tessa, found it hard to persevere with goals. Jake reported that the lack of support from his course provider disrupted his educational pathway.

Jake

One of Jake's dream jobs was to work in hospitality. He was expelled from his hospitality course on the assumption that he was a 'trouble-

maker' and for unknowingly breaking a regulation regarding his personal appearance:

Jake [...] they found [combat sports equipment] in my bag so they thought that I was a troublemaker and that got me into trouble as well, so yeah, I got kicked out for that.

Jake had also made a change to his personal appearance without realising that this was against the course rules. He recounted that he felt that the school's expectation that he could change his appearance back to how it was within a day was unreasonable and he also did not have the resources to do so. As a consequence he was stood down from the course.

Jake used this situation to think about other opportunities. When the door to studying towards a career in hospitality closed, Jake changed direction, taking steps to pursue his other dream job by enrolling in a transition course specialising in a different discipline. This experience showed the adaptability of the young person, but also illustrated how quickly his path could be diverted from his goals – in later interviews, Jake was still thinking through his options.

Ariana found it difficult to continue with her educational pathway due to a combination of chance events and complex external influences.

Ariana

Ariana's upbringing was disrupted by drug use, physical abuse, and a lack of supportive relationships. A combination of chance occurrences, her familial environment, and Ariana's coping mechanisms, had hindered Ariana's ability to stay in education. Ariana was stood down from school after accidentally hitting a peer with an item she was swinging. Despite apologising to her peer, he

responded by slapping Ariana. Ariana reacted by giving him ‘a hiding’:

For the guy I was fighting, oh I was going to boxing and I didn't mind, I took him on. For you to hit me after me apologising, I meant every word I said, it was an accident.

Soon after returning to school, Ariana was expelled. Again, the reason behind the expulsion was a combination of Ariana's behaviour, external influences, and chance. Ariana was bullied and threatened by an older student into bringing drugs to school. Another student informed the school, but sided with the bully rather than Ariana. The bully was caught with the drugs in his possession, but Ariana felt pressure from her peers to take the blame.

In both of these events the action (or decision of another) disrupted Ariana's educational pathway but how she coped with these challenges was also associated with other external pressures and abuse outside of the school environment. Her decision to take the blame for the drugs was in reaction to the pressure of her peers, but was also related to what was going on at home. She talked about personal exhaustion arising from her physically abusive home environment overriding her motivation to continue with her education, making it hard to keep going or stand up for herself at school:

I'd rather leave school. I didn't know high school was like this, we're all immature kids, just coz you're bigger than me, and I can't take it. If nothing like this is going on at home, I'll take anything and everything that they got. But because what's going on at home is bringing me down, dragging me down, I can't fight, I'm tired [...]

Despite telling the principal that she was bullied and threatened by

her peers, she was still expelled.

When her education was cut short, Ariana took on the care of her sister's children. Ariana's method of coping with challenges was influenced by her feelings of responsibility towards others and her need to protect and care for others (particularly her family). A few years after her expulsion, Ariana's pathway was again destabilised by chance. She had the opportunity to work in an area of interest, but found it hard to keep going when her friend passed away:

I just stopped going. I just started for the first three weeks and it was just hard not seeing my friend anymore so I just stopped going there.

In the narratives of Jake, Ariana, and Tessa, the influence, actions, or assumptions, of other people played a role in the young person finding it difficult to persevere with their educational pathway and goals. This was a pattern which emerged across several other young people's narratives; Daniel was signed out of school by a family member without warning because she felt he had 'started to wag too often'. Although Daniel was angry with the family member for pulling him out of school, it was unclear whether discussing this decision with him prior to signing him out would have made a difference to his attendance. Other than on the day of his removal from school, Daniel never brought up the issue with the family member, nor did he try to get back into school. There was a sense that Ariana and Jake's life course could have been different if they had sufficient support from staff (i.e. tutors, principal, teachers, or board of trustees) when they faced exclusion from their schools. An unsupportive work or educational environment can exacerbate a situation already disrupted by chance. In other situations the young person did not respond well to the teaching methods, instruction, or attitude of educators or employers. For Samuel, it was a sudden

change in tutors on his farming course, and the lack of reciprocity in the new tutor's teaching methods, which resulted in him walking out of the course:

Everyone hated [the new tutor] because the way he tried teaching just didn't work with us, it's a two way thing, and he's just one of those people that demanded respect whether it's given, and that's the thing that made me go nuts in the first place, so I told him to stick it and left.

For Ariana, Tessa, and many other young people in the study, their home environments had a substantial impact on them. Ariana and Tessa both talked about exhaustion arising from the dynamics and unhelpful influence of their familial relationships that made it hard to persevere with education (Ariana), or education and employment goals (Tessa). Ariana's narrative included periods of time where family contact ceased completely, and she admitted that communication breakdowns within her family network made it hard to trust others. Ariana and Tessa also lacked enduring, supportive relationships in their wider community, inhibiting their access to social capital.

Lack of material resources also contributed to young people not being able to take advantage of a chance opportunity or being able to persevere after accepting an opportunity. Bobby found a job through her key worker, but problems with transport made it difficult to keep her new job, and after a few weeks she was let go for being unreliable:

Yeah, I was working there [...] and training and all that, I kind of effed that up because I was unreliable. There was a whole mission on getting the bus, and bussing all over on time [...] but I still couldn't get there on time coz the bus route – people coming on the bus, it was delayed, or traffic, or like... and no one

had a car at the time.

Bobby was open to accepting help from her key worker when it was offered, and overall tended to view past experiences as positive, even when they did not lead to ongoing work or education. Chance played a significant role in her access to opportunities through her key worker. However, at the time of the interview, she was pregnant and about to be put on home detention. Her key worker had offered to support her through home detention and help her find a job and accommodation, but it would mean living away from her family:

It sounds like a good plan, but everyone's like, you're gonna need your family around [for the baby], so I'm like, double minded now that I'm getting close to my due date.

Often multiple factors contribute to a young person's decision to accept an opportunity. A young person may choose not to follow up on an opportunity if it affects other personal resources, needs, or priorities, or if it negatively impacts on a close relationship. In Bobby's case, needing the support of her biological family during her pregnancy outweighed the support and material benefits offered by her key worker. Other examples which reflected this pattern were seen in the narratives of Selena and Alyssia. Selena chose not to pursue her goal of working overseas because it would conflict with the plans of her new partner and Alyssia prioritised her social life over the opportunity to record a demo of her music with an overseas producer.

In Jake's narrative, the expulsion from his course was partially the result of the school's assumption that he was a "troublemaker". False accusation or accusation without sufficient evidence was seen in a number of interviews. The young person's method of coping with the stress of an accusation can exacerbate a situation. When one young

person, Pete, was accused of stealing property from his course, his reaction did not work in his favour, and he was subsequently expelled from his course and fired from his job (which was connected to the course):

The tutor asked if I did coz I was on bail at the time for robbery, asked me if it was me who did it. I told him nah I probably won't find your [property] and after that he just thought that it was me, coz I kind of known to it in a way, I said I might be able to find them, I asked the other dude he said already sold them 'they can get fucked'. So the tutor thought it was me. I went back to course, went back to work the next day and was on breakfast break walked back over the house he started asking where's the [property] rah, rah, rah, you can get fired for this, I just told him to shut up, so I just attacked him. Got fired.

Several young people reported that their risk taking behaviour made it hard for them to persevere with education, employment, and their goals. Corey was offered work by a friend of a neighbour but after a month of working, his criminal activity interfered with this employment opportunity and further down the track, with another chance offer of employment:

Interviewer And how long did you have that job for?

Participant Like a month.

Interviewer And then what got in the way of that?

Participant Me, I got locked up.

Interviewer So you got locked up and couldn't do that job anymore?

Participant Yeah.

Interviewer And then you came out and you got another job?

Participant I was working – I was with [a youth programme]

and then through my neighbours again I sussed out this other fella who was doing [a trade], yeah.

Interviewer And what was that like?

Participant It was all good, and then that finished and I was gonna do – I can't remember what it is now, but I was going to do it with one of his friends, and then I got locked up, and just – bro! Made everything sour, eh.

Interviewer So that got in the way of all those plans?

Participant Yeah, hard!

Inconsistent support can also contribute to missed opportunities. Kahu's connection with a mentor through a service was initially a positive turning point, but became unhelpful over time as inconsistencies in the mentoring process became apparent. His father (PMK) noticed a distinct change in Kahu, including fluctuating levels of motivation during and after the mentoring:

I think [the mentor] was just teaching him his – [sport] and everything, taking him to the gym, yeah, taking him for a ride, he used to come pick him up a couple times a week for a couple hours – take him to the gym or whatever they were going to get up to. That was really the best thing I've seen, and that time of his life anyway, of him changing his ways. Yeah he was real happy, every time [...]

Kahu's father noticed more 'positive talk' under the guidance of his mentor. He became less interested in his gang affiliation, throwing away 'all his black and blues and bandanas', and wanted to get involved in a sport. But when the mentor started missing days, and not turning up, Kahu lost interest and started 'going back to his old ways'. In this narrative, Kahu was reliant on a positive outcome from his service experience to follow through on plans to pursue a sport.

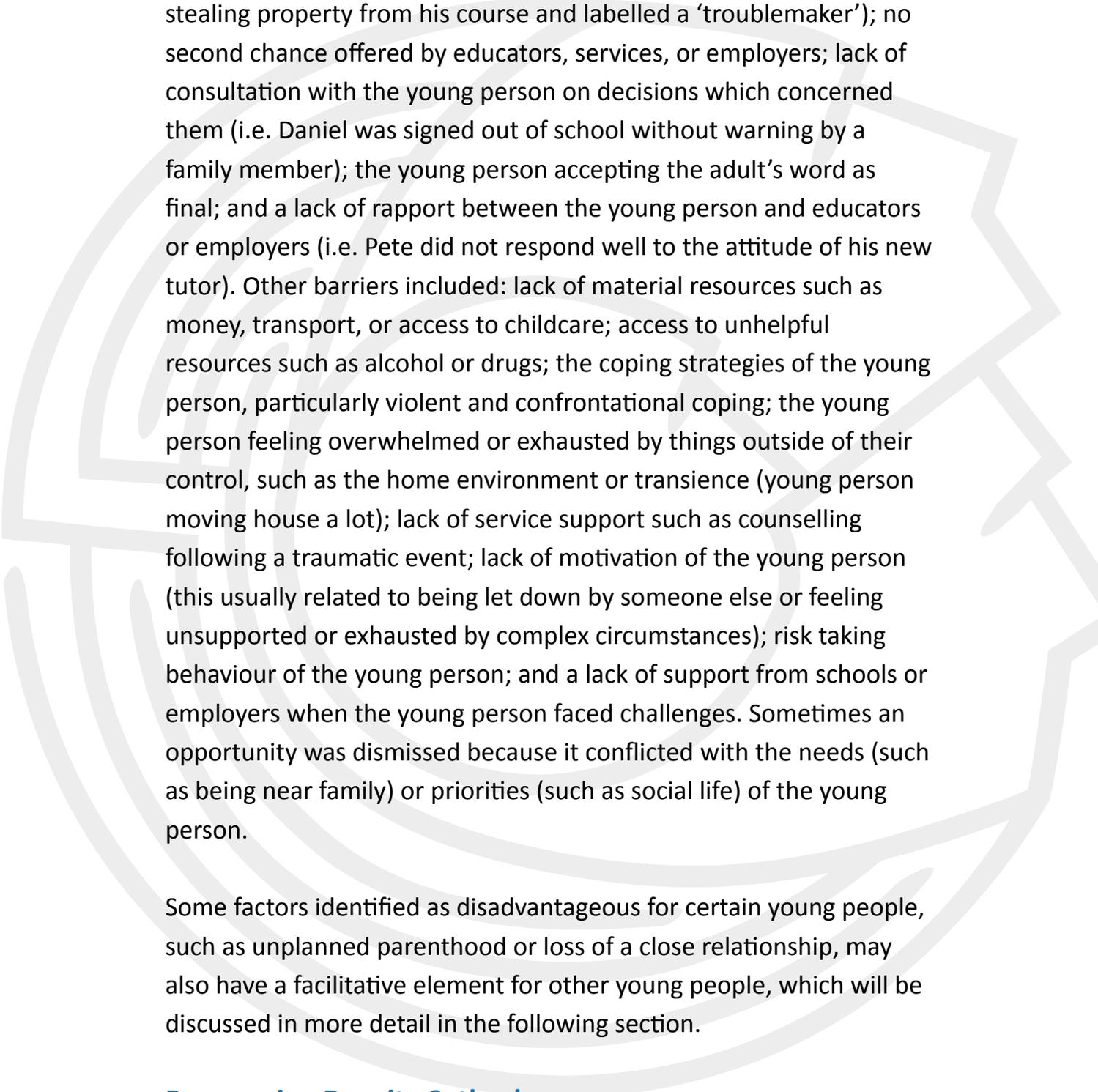
His father also noted Kahu's disappointment at being let down by the mentor:

Yeah, I just looked at him and I asked him when I came home and I seen him at home, 'oh did you go with [the mentor]?' 'No, he didn't even come over.' I said, oh yeah, and that was it. He just had a bummed out look on him. And that's when I started noticing him trickling off.

Unexpected illness, injury, or loss of someone close was one of the most common reasons for the young people in this research to find it hard to stick with a particular pathway or take advantage of an opportunity. Such major life events were common among the young people and, generally, when struck by sudden illness or injury themselves or confronted with it in someone important in their lives the event compounded the disadvantage they faced. However, Gemma, reflected that being involved in a car accident was 'a blessing in disguise' because it gave her a reason to discontinue working for her employer:

Yeah, I had my car accident and that was almost like a blessing in disguise, it gave me, um, a reason to be able to leave them without saying I don't want to work for you anymore because I felt unsafe.

A multitude of different factors were identified in this theme as being unhelpful in keeping the young person engaged on a particular pathway, or enabling them to make future plans, stick with goals, or take advantage of opportunities. Relationships were identified as playing an important role in impeding positive outcomes. Unhelpful factors in relationships included: a lack of emotional and practical support; bullying and other unsupportive relationships; a challenging home, school or work environment, including violence and alcohol



and drug use of family members or peers; mistrust and suspicion from employers, tutors, or teachers (i.e. Jake was suspected of stealing property from his course and labelled a ‘troublemaker’); no second chance offered by educators, services, or employers; lack of consultation with the young person on decisions which concerned them (i.e. Daniel was signed out of school without warning by a family member); the young person accepting the adult’s word as final; and a lack of rapport between the young person and educators or employers (i.e. Pete did not respond well to the attitude of his new tutor). Other barriers included: lack of material resources such as money, transport, or access to childcare; access to unhelpful resources such as alcohol or drugs; the coping strategies of the young person, particularly violent and confrontational coping; the young person feeling overwhelmed or exhausted by things outside of their control, such as the home environment or transience (young person moving house a lot); lack of service support such as counselling following a traumatic event; lack of motivation of the young person (this usually related to being let down by someone else or feeling unsupported or exhausted by complex circumstances); risk taking behaviour of the young person; and a lack of support from schools or employers when the young person faced challenges. Sometimes an opportunity was dismissed because it conflicted with the needs (such as being near family) or priorities (such as social life) of the young person.

Some factors identified as disadvantageous for certain young people, such as unplanned parenthood or loss of a close relationship, may also have a facilitative element for other young people, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Persevering Despite Setbacks

This section explores instances of chance where the young person

was able to remain on track with their plans and goals. It explores facilitative factors and coping strategies which helped the young person progress and persevere with particular pathways or plans when confronted with challenges.

In the following case study, Jamie's relationship with a teacher, the additional assistance of a school counsellor, and Jamie's own strengths, enabled her to finish her school year when faced with challenges outside of her control.

Jamie

Jamie had experienced disrupted relationships with her family and frequent changes in care. Jamie moved into independent living (flattening) soon after finishing high school, and was able to balance the responsibilities of contributing to the running of her flat, with employment and studying at polytechnic. She described herself as the 'mother' of the flat even though she was the youngest of the flatmates. She saw her maturity as an attribute that differentiated her from other members of her family, especially her mother.

While still at high school, Jamie faced a sudden turning point which disrupted her educational pathway. She deployed positive coping strategies to deal with this transition and an opportunity offered by her teacher enabled her to continue with her education.

At the time of the Round One interview, Jamie was in her last year of high school and was living with her mother. When her mother planned to move (a decision that Jamie perceived as her mother choosing her partner over her children), Jamie was forced to make a decision about where she would live while finishing her school year. She sought advice from a teacher and school counsellor, and her teacher offered Jamie the chance to live with her so that she could finish her studies. This offer of accommodation meant that she would

not have to move to another city or change schools. It did, however, limit her access to financial support as Jamie was not entitled to financial assistance from the government. Weighing up her options, she took advantage of the opportunity to move in with her teacher, and successfully completed her final year of school. Her teacher provided her with free board, and Jamie supported herself financially by working while studying. Jamie had little support from her family at this time, but had practical support from her teacher and emotional support from her partner. Jamie's own strength also helped her to get through this challenging time:

Jamie I've had to do a lot of growing up, since we did that first interview. Crazy, it's crazy, moving out of home, well not moving out of home not having a choice of moving out of home, but I didn't have a choice to move out of home. Um and then moving into my teacher's house, dealing with people, kind of like making those final judgements, I was new as well.

Interviewer Making judgements coz you're not living at home.

Jamie Yeah.

Interviewer More traditional...

Jamie Living with your teacher's a bit weird.

Interviewer Yeah.

Jamie Um but you know I'm pretty strong you know, and everyone kind of knew, you know, and I kind of explained it but um yeah.

Jamie's awareness of her own strengths suggested an inner confidence in her ability to face challenges. Her strengths were evident in the way she sought and accepted advice from her teacher and counsellor, her decision to take advantage of an opportunity despite material disadvantages, and her ability to support herself

financially, maintaining employment without this impacting on her studies. Other assistance that was beneficial during this transition, enabling her to finish school, were the practical support from her teacher, counsellor, the emotional support of her partner, and her access to material resources (housing, free board, and the money she earned from her job).

The facilitative potential of social capital was evident in Jamie's relationship with her teacher, and also her positive relationships with peers and teachers when she transitioned into further education. Jamie's awareness of where she fitted in at her flat and within her family, her sense of independence, and her proactive decision-making regarding her education, pointed towards a strong sense of agency. The next case example introduces Nikau who, in contrast to Jamie, had a strong connection to family. However, although he exhibited an ability to persevere with interests and goals after an unexpected injury, over time other factors made it harder to sustain the motivation to persevere.

Nikau

At the time of the Round One interview, Nikau was living at home with his parents. Nikau was particularly close to two of his siblings, one who was a strong support of Nikau's interests and goals and who helped him to find a course. Prior to the interview, Nikau was in an accident which left him with a permanent physical impairment. He was a hands-on and practical person, so his sister, Anika (PMK), believed that the accident could have left him at a disadvantage in terms of his goals. She was surprised that Nikau did not let this stand in the way of his interests, and admired his tenacity:

Interviewer What about when he – we interviewed him last week and he was talking about how he got into a [trade] course?

Anika *Yeah, I remember him doing that, yeah.*

Interviewer *Do you remember anything more about that?*

Anika *No, not really. But I remember him doing that and I was like, how can you do [a trade] when your [impairment] is like that but he is like, easy, like I can play [sports] still and I'm like, oh, eh, so how are you going to hold the ball, and he goes don't worry, I can still hold the ball!*

Anika saw the trade course as a potential career platform for her brother, but also felt that there were other barriers, unrelated to his injury, which stopped him from becoming a certified tradesperson:

Mainly he's been going through courses that are like this [trade course] and I'm not too sure, you know what I mean? It's just like helping him out and – to like probably like a pathway but nothing seemed to help him, but I think when he's jumped onto that [course], maybe [trade] is something that he wants to do?

Although Nikau did not let the accident stop him from working on his trade-related projects and playing sports, he did have trouble staying on track with his courses. Over the three interviews he mentioned a family member as someone who could help him into work related to the trade he was interested in, and he seemed to rely on this as his way into the industry. This opportunity did not eventuate because Nikau needed the required trade certificate. Nikau was not held back by his injury but found it hard to transition into work without the necessary qualifications and reliable contacts to pursue his trade of interest. In the Round Three interview, Nikau was no longer sure he wanted to continue with a trade and was looking for 'any job'.

Nikau showed the determination and self-confidence to continue with his interests and goals after a traumatic accident; however, over

time, his lack of resources, qualifications, and confidence, made it difficult for him to continue pursuing his goals. In the next case example, Rachelle took advantage of an opportunity to work with a family member, (she was still working in this position at the time of the Round Three interview). There were complex issues surrounding Rachelle's decision to stay in the job, showing that persevering with employment or an opportunity may indicate the strength and resilience of a young person, yet may also have a detrimental impact on the young person's sense of wellbeing.

Rachelle

Although her family relations were complicated, maintaining a connection with her extended family was important to Rachelle. When a family member offered her an opportunity of employment, she chose to take advantage of the offer even though her relationship with the family member was strained. The decision to take the job also meant she remained in close contact with another member of the family who made her feel unsafe.

A few years prior to transitioning into the job, Rachelle had been the victim of a sexual assault while staying with extended family. She turned to her family at this time, but there was little support, and certain members of her family denied she was telling the truth. Rachelle felt torn between wanting the man who assaulted her to admit what he had done, and not wanting to jeopardise her relationship with family:

I don't know what to do about it, yeah it's a sticky situation it's like do you want your family to stay by your side or do you want them gone again.

While at a family gathering, Rachelle talked of how she had made the decision to 'pretend it never happened'. Her mother (PMK),

described Rachelle's ability to 'switch her mind off', which could be seen in her decision to work with a family member who was living with the offender:

Rachelle can like switch her mind off and just say you know, she would much rather have the closeness with her [...] family, she doesn't want to break up the happy home. So she kind of just turns a blind eye to it or blind ear to it and just pretend it didn't happen, just get on with life you know.

Rachelle's mother noted an inner strength in her daughter which helped Rachelle get through this challenge and persevere with her job:

Yeah I still think that it does still affect her but she is very strong-minded and you know just push it to the side for the sake of you know having a loving family and not splitting up that, you know.

In Rachelle's narrative the turning point was initiated by the actions of another (the offender), a traumatic event which continued to have a negative impact on her. When a chance opportunity (the offer of employment) had connections to the offender, Rachelle still chose to accept this opportunity. It enabled her to remain in touch with another family member who was important to her, and not cause further conflict within the family. This was at the expense of her own wellbeing and sense of closure, but she had the consistent support and solidarity of her mother which helped her get through these challenging times.

The narratives of Rachelle, Nikau, and Jamie show how the young people persevere even when faced with complex challenges. This meant different things for each of the young people. For Rachelle, the decision to persevere with employment was motivated by the

importance of keeping links with her family, even when the decision had the potential to re-traumatise her. Nikau showed determination to persevere with interests and goals after an accident resulted in permanent physical impairment, though further down the track it became harder for him to do so for reasons unrelated to his injury. Jamie was able to finish her school year, despite setbacks, and continued on to further education. A combination of inner strength and the help and guidance of teachers and a guidance counsellor were particularly helpful for her when making this transition.

Seth, whose education and future goals were interrupted by a serious infection which put him in hospital, relied on his own strength and willpower to learn to walk again as quickly as possible so as not to rely on a wheelchair:

Interviewer Did you have any support while you were learning to walk?

Seth Nah, I just told mum to leave me alone coz I was trying to like force myself to walk coz there was no way in hell I was gonna go in a wheelchair. Like I always pushed the wheelchair when I'd say I didn't want it and just tried standing up even though I was sore.

Interviewer Yeah, did you have physio or anything?

Seth Yeah, but oh like, I just didn't want to stay in hospital for ages. It does your head in.

Seth also tried to keep up with his school work while in hospital. Although the determination to get well was paramount when Seth was in hospital, on leaving hospital he found it hard to stay at school because of the pain caused by the infection. His mother (PMK) also noted that although he persevered with his studies while in hospital, once discharged he found it difficult to keep up with his school work.

Zach, also made the most of a difficult situation and overcame setbacks. He broke his leg in an accident and required surgery. Zach did not perceive it as a barrier to employment and managed to continue in a physically demanding maintenance job once he had learned to walk again. Zach accepted the support of his family while in hospital. He considered his time in hospital as a positive experience and used the resources offered, such as physiotherapy, to get him back on track.

Across the narratives there were common threads of what enabled young people to overcome setbacks. Personal resources, such as self-confidence, a positive attitude, and positive or constructive coping strategies, were identified by almost all of the young people. Several young people reported that their interests gave them motivation to keep going with a project even if things became difficult. These experiences were also positive in that they boosted the young person's confidence in their abilities. Mentoring and support also assisted in the completion of projects or staying in employment. The ability to take advantage of opportunities, accept outside help and support, and seek advice from others, were recognised by the young people as being particularly helpful. Several young people reported that access to material resources (i.e. money, housing, or transport), were crucial in order for them to continue on with goals or a current pathway. For example, Jamie supported herself through school by working, but relied on the kindness of her teacher who allowed her stay without paying board. In many of the narratives, the ability to persevere with goals was hindered by the young person's risk taking behaviour. This and young people's ability to navigate to support within their own networks is the focus of the next section.

Risk Taking and Hidden Resilience

This theme covers references to chance which relate to a young person's risk taking behaviour, challenging behaviour, or potentially harmful coping strategies, such as physical violence, self-harm, criminal activity, and alcohol consumption or drug use.

Ungar (2015) argues that although many of the coping strategies and behaviour identified in young people with complex needs may appear maladaptive, they could also be indicative of a hidden resilience. Hidden resilience refers to coping strategies and the ways in which young people draw on their resources and strengths in order to navigate and manage their environments. This resilience, though unconventional, makes sense when considering the factors which trigger these responses. According to Ungar, hidden resilience falls into two categories - risk taking behaviour and atypical coping which are employed by a young person to cope with "environments that threaten their psychosocial development", such as running away to escape domestic violence, or bringing a weapon to school in response to bullying; and coping strategies that are "culturally embedded", pertaining to strategies which make sense in one cultural context but may be unacceptable or frowned upon in another (2015: 102).

This section will look at some of the ways chance affected young people's behaviour for better or worse, fostered or counteracted potentially harmful coping strategies, and built hidden resilience. The young person in the following case study, Alex, faced a significant turning point after the unexpected loss of an influential support person which led to the escalation of his aggressive and risk taking behaviour.

Alex

As a child, Alex developed a fear and mistrust of male figures after being exposed to domestic abuse at home. In Alex's narrative a positive turning point occurred during adolescence when his mother began a new relationship with a man, Graeme, who was to become Alex's stepfather. His mother (PMK) recalled that Alex formed a strong bond with Graeme, looking up to him as a male role model, and through this relationship, Alex learnt that there were male figures he could rely on and trust. Alex's schooling went smoothly up until he reached high school and he believed this was due to the positive influence of his step-father.

Alex considered Graeme one of his main support people. When Graeme was diagnosed with a rare disease, this resulted in a considerable change in Alex's behaviour which led to being stood down from school. After being stood down, Alex recalled he began running away from home, taking drugs, and stealing in order to fund his drug-use.

His mother also noted this change in her son's attitude and behaviour when her partner fell ill. He became unmotivated and angry, losing interest in his goals:

He was looking forward to going to college, unfortunately his goals – no longer had goals once Graeme fell sick, it was like all his goals, all his future, just died down, and things just got worse and worse from there.

His mother elaborated on this major turning point, and Alex's subsequent coping strategies:

Yeah, for Alex to be able to trust someone, took a long time for that – Graeme comes along and things were amazing and we

lost it all again really. Just a bad stage in life that happened, and I believe – the age that he was at he was just against everything after that. I think the question he probably asked was – I think he was just angry that this man had been taken away from us, we do feel like that, there's been so much hurt in Alex, and I think a lot of it was, he didn't care anymore. He's never been one to listen to authority so they weren't helping him in any way.

Alex described becoming a 'different person' after the death of his step-father. He turned to crime, alcohol, and drugs as a way to 'solve everything', a decision which was exacerbated by a move to a new neighbourhood where he became involved with a gang network. He talked about this move as the 'worst decision' for his family, because of the negative influences it introduced into his life.

Young people often experienced more than one turning point over the course of the interviews. When one of his friends was arrested for drug-related offences, and another friend died in a drink-driving accident, Alex decided to cut back on his own alcohol and drug use. Another motivating factor was the realisation of the impact his behaviour had on his family:

Another reason I want to change, I want to prove to my grandad I can be a better person, I have let him down a bit. And I could see the effect it had on him, so I'm kind of turning round to prove to him, look, I'm not the asshole grandson you kind of thought I was – not really like that but – I can prove to you, look, I can go somewhere in life and make you proud.

Alex made a similar promise to his deceased friend, learning something about himself through his friend's mistake:

Then I made a promise to him, I'm never going to touch crack and stuff again, and I don't want to break it really, coz that's pretty ratshit to my bro – he was a best mate for me really.

Alex learned from his friend's mistakes, vowing to make changes to his own behaviour. However, the promises he made to his family and friend were hard to sustain, and Alex struggled to stay out of trouble. Part of this was due to breaching the conditions of his home detention, but also difficulties in resisting the influence of the 'wrong crowd'.

In Alex's narrative, getting caught up in the 'wrong crowd', made it difficult to sustain positive change. Sara also struggled to resist the strong negative influence of a close relationship. A family intervention made it possible to cut ties with this person.

Sara

In this narrative, the risk behaviour is considered to be Sara's drug use. Sara met her partner, Rowan, through friends. Her drug use escalated with the pressure from her new partner. Her mother (PMK) believed that Rowan was 'feeding' Sara drugs, muddying Sara's ability to assess the risks involved with being with Rowan when he began to present violent and controlling behaviours. When Sara was the victim of an apparently random violent attack by a group of individuals unknown to her, her mother sought advice from the police and a domestic abuse charity, as she believed Sara's partner had something to do with the incident. Following advice from the services she had approached, Sara's mother organised a family intervention in an attempt to remove Sara from the unsafe environment with her partner. Her mother recalled that Sara 'didn't really want to go'. She gave her daughter an ultimatum, Sara could either move in with her uncle, or move in with Rowan, but if Rowan hurt her again, her mother warned her daughter she would not be

there to pick up the pieces. Sara chose to move in with her uncle, who helped her to decrease her drug use with the assistance of medicinal herbs, reconnect with her culture, and gain employment. Her mother also educated Sara on the possible side effects of her drug use. Sara saw her uncle as a father figure, someone she could go to for advice, and there was a mentoring nature to their relationship:

We get along really well, but we just can't manage, we couldn't live together, or work together, we just can't be in each other's faces for too long, but he's someone I definitely go back to for advice, and he still accepts me with open arms every time. He's kinda like the dad that I – never had, so he's really supportive.

Although the job with her uncle did not work out and Sara eventually moved out of her uncle's house, the family intervention was effective in keeping her away from her partner, despite the partner's persistence.

After ceasing contact with her partner, and in later interviews, things continued to improve for Sara in many ways. She began a new relationship with a supportive partner who helped to build her confidence, she found stable employment, and was taking educational steps to pursue a career in an area of interest.

Sara's narrative shares similarities with other young people, where resisting influences that encourage behaviours such as offending, risk taking, or drug and alcohol use, required taking themselves out of the environment, or being removed from the environment. But this removal or removing oneself is often ineffective as a long-term strategy when there are insufficient supports and resources to substitute the loss of networks or relationships.

For Sara, completely uplifting her from an unsafe environment was

enough to dramatically change her pathway. This process was intensive, encompassing a variety of approaches to enable change to occur, such as employment, alternative medicine, cultural knowledge, and education on drug-use. Sara's uncle relayed to her mother that Sara cried for several weeks because she missed her partner, an issue that was only resolved when she was urged to throw her phone away, making it impossible for her partner to get hold of her. This demonstrates the power of negative influences and how this can outweigh many of the supports wrapped around a young person. It also highlights Sara's hidden resilience, as although she was reluctant to leave her partner when given the ultimatum by her mother to stay in an abusive relationship or accept her family's help she chose family. She was able to maintain many of the changes initiated at that time.

While Sara's familial support, and the mentoring and resources they provided, appeared to be sufficient in promoting a sustainable positive change, for Thomas, family were the unhelpful network that encouraged his challenging behaviour, and it was a chance encounter that offered a way out.

Thomas

Thomas had ongoing behavioural issues throughout his school life. He also had trouble at school due to learning difficulties. He had been exposed to violence in the family growing up and his relationship with his siblings and mother was turbulent. The chance encounter in Thomas's narrative was a man who lived down the road from him. The man, Dave, became an important mentor for Thomas. Over the three qualitative interviews, Thomas moved between living with his family, and living with Dave (PMK). Dave perceived Thomas's biological family as an unhelpful influence for Thomas, as they were unsupportive, found it hard to commit to work or future goals, had few friends, and were unemployed at the time of the first PMK

interview – ‘You know, just going nowhere’. In comparison, with Dave, Thomas had access to material resources related to his interests and had the positive influence of Dave’s family and their personal network.

Thomas also had a teacher, Gavin, who was supportive. Gavin tried to help Thomas stay in school by ‘defusing situations’ and keeping Thomas busy. Gavin’s support extended outside of school grounds, as he offered Thomas a job doing maintenance work.

Thomas’s relationship with both of these important support people was jeopardised when he stole school property. For Dave, who had put trust in Thomas and given him responsibilities that included handling money, he considered the theft a betrayal of trust. The consequence of Thomas’s behaviour was that his neighbour, Dave, ceased contact with him. The loss of support was a turning point for Thomas and he took steps to change his behaviour:

If someone had said to me, you know I stole that [school property], and then I lied to them about it, coz they asked me ‘did you steal it?’ and I was like, ‘nah’ and he found out, like Dave found out that I did, but, and then he said, I don’t want anything to do with ya, but if it wasn’t for that, I don’t think I would have sorted myself out.

Dave shared a similar view of this turning point:

Dave Like [the turning point] probably started when I told [Thomas] I wasn’t gonna help anymore, I’d had it with him because he wasn’t helping himself. I’d just, I’d been worn down to him, it was hard you know because of like, it’s all the, just the counselling every day, trying to put the right shit

in his head you know? And it was going in one ear and out the other, so that, then I don't know what was going on, I've certainly heard the bad shit from his mum tell, telling him all the time, but something, something happened that made him, get himself back in school, you know. Did what he had to do to do it, and he wanted to do it. And...

Interviewer That's sort of what...

Dave And, and he's stayed in school, so something, the penny's dropped you know.

Although it took some time to resolve the relationship, Dave and his wife were Thomas's most enduring supports throughout the interviews. Similarly, Thomas continued to have contact with his teacher, Gavin.

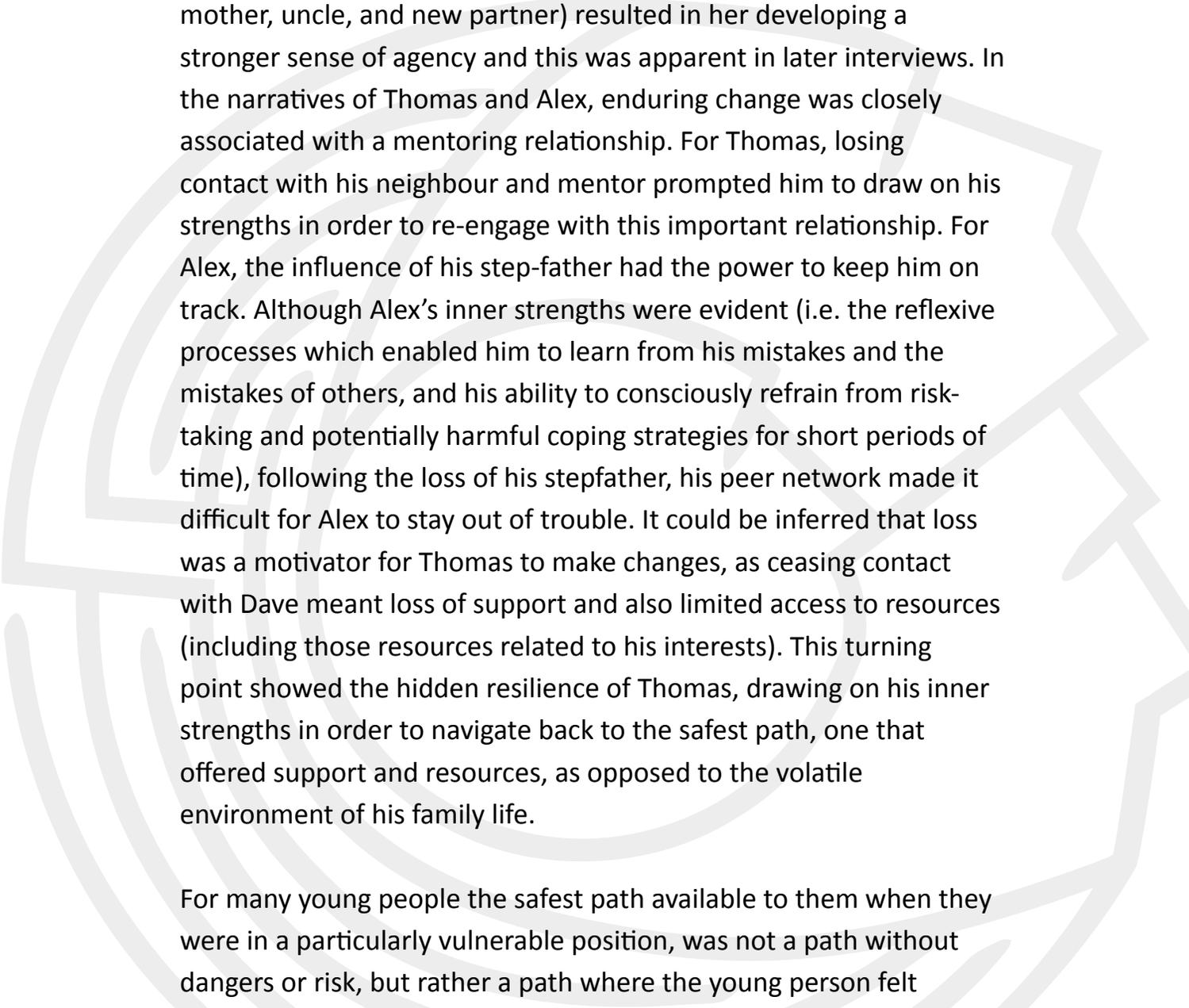
Dave maintained that the negative influence for Thomas was his family, rather than a peer group. Dave felt his role was to 'put the right shit' in Thomas's head, but it was not until Thomas learnt that the consequences of his behaviour could sever his contact with an important support person that he was able to turn things around. In this respect, the real change came from the young person and his actions and attitude, but was motivated by external influences. Unlike Alex, peers were not mentioned as significant influences in Thomas's interviews. Thomas also expressed a reluctance to maintain close contact with his family.

As multiple influences can have a bearing on the decisions a young person makes, and play a role in determining outcomes, the narratives of Sara, Thomas, and Alex suggest there are no quick fixes to promoting enduring positive change for young people who confront high levels of risk throughout childhood. Taking Sara out of a situation and removing her from a negative network may have

significantly changed her pathway, but had she not met her new partner after moving out of her uncle's house, this could have been a different story. This is where a chance occurrence, meeting someone, or being offered help by someone at the right time can have a dramatic impact on the young person's trajectory.

Loss was a recurring theme in many of the narratives. As can be seen in the narratives of Alex, Thomas, and Sara, loss could be a turning point which changed the young person's path for better or worse. Rain's child was removed because of her involvement in a robbery. This traumatic loss of her child helped her to realise what was important to her and how she would change her narrative if she had the chance to go back and make different decisions. Often it was in this reflexive process that a young person made sense of their experiences and how they would change things if they encountered similar challenges. However, potentially harmful behaviour can also become embedded in the young person's sense of self, as was the case with Evan who, at 11 years old, was coerced by a family member into selling drugs. This formative experience led to Evan finding similar means of making money at high school. In retrospect he recognised how he could have done things differently, but admitted how hard that was when his behaviour played a role in shaping his sense of identity:

Like I could have stopped what I was doing at any time I wanted to, I could have just left all my mates, [...] but I didn't, because it's so hard not to do it, coz it's like it becomes a way of, the way you think about yourself that kinda, it's like you having respect for yourself, in my head it was like I was having respect for myself really it was like me being a dick thinking I'm one of the big boys when really I was just 13 just like still getting out of my nappies and stuff in a way.



For Sara, the loss of her partner was initially painful, but over time the substitution of this relationship with other influences (such as her mother, uncle, and new partner) resulted in her developing a stronger sense of agency and this was apparent in later interviews. In the narratives of Thomas and Alex, enduring change was closely associated with a mentoring relationship. For Thomas, losing contact with his neighbour and mentor prompted him to draw on his strengths in order to re-engage with this important relationship. For Alex, the influence of his step-father had the power to keep him on track. Although Alex's inner strengths were evident (i.e. the reflexive processes which enabled him to learn from his mistakes and the mistakes of others, and his ability to consciously refrain from risk-taking and potentially harmful coping strategies for short periods of time), following the loss of his stepfather, his peer network made it difficult for Alex to stay out of trouble. It could be inferred that loss was a motivator for Thomas to make changes, as ceasing contact with Dave meant loss of support and also limited access to resources (including those resources related to his interests). This turning point showed the hidden resilience of Thomas, drawing on his inner strengths in order to navigate back to the safest path, one that offered support and resources, as opposed to the volatile environment of his family life.

For many young people the safest path available to them when they were in a particularly vulnerable position, was not a path without dangers or risk, but rather a path where the young person felt protected or found a sense of belonging. Rain, who spent some time homeless after running away from care, found a sense of safety in a chance encounter during this period of transience. The stranger offered her food and a place to stay, and as this chance meeting occurred when she had 'nowhere to go' and had 'absolutely nothing' she accepted his help. Although this chance encounter was not necessarily a positive influence for the young person in the long term

and the relationship was volatile, he continued to play an important familial-type role for her, providing her with housing at different points in her life.

For several young people chance was related to a misunderstanding. A false accusation had the potential to incite the young person to lash out in frustration. For example, Ari, was required to stand in front of the school's Board of Trustees after being caught truanting and taking drugs. The situation was exacerbated by a staff member mistaking him for his friend during the meeting. Ari, frustrated at being blamed for the actions of his friend and feeling disrespected at not being listened to, reacted by swearing, which led to an immediate expulsion from school. A close friend (PMK) of one young person, Tyler, said that he and Tyler felt targeted and blamed by the police for crimes they were not involved in and this encouraged them to offend as they were already being blamed for other offences. Being listened to, supported, and respected, made a significant positive difference for the young people in this study.

In many narratives a strong sense of independence was evident, though often this was influenced by circumstances outside of the young person's control rather than being associated with opportunities to make pro-social decisions. Being able to direct, alter, and gain insight into their narrative or biography as a reflexive project, was one way in which young people were able to develop a sense of control. In the narratives of Thomas and Sara, the real change occurred when the decision was in their hands. For Thomas, 'the penny dropped' when he lost the guidance of an important support person. He chose to stay in school and took steps to change his behaviour. Similarly, the pivotal moments for Sara were when she decided to accept her family's intervention. For other young people the search for a sense of agency led to employing potentially harmful coping strategies, such as Tessa, who resisted counselling

after the sudden deaths of more than one person within her social circle. She preferred to deal with loss in her own way rather than accept outside assistance:

They wanted me to do [counselling], and I just can't talk to people. I would rather hold it in than deal with it. Yea and they all had their eye out for me. Thinking that, I was going to explode or something. Yea, but nah. I was dealing with it in my own way... I just got drunk, turned to crime. (Laugh). Yea started stealing cars and smoking dope and oh well cannabis not anything else. Yeah, still do, but yeah. (Laugh).

Alcohol and drug use were common coping mechanisms for young people when faced with challenges. Some young people found these methods of coping preferable to or more effective than conventional forms of therapy or medication. As with Sara, a change in the relationships close to the young person influenced their coping strategies. A supportive new partner or positive peer network had the potential to alleviate a reliance on alcohol or drugs. Conversely, as can be seen in Alex's narrative, the unhelpful influence of a young person's network was one of the most common factors hindering a young person's ability to stay out of trouble or refrain from alcohol or drug use. Although employment was an effective way for many young people to substitute potentially harmful behaviour or coping strategies, the influence of others had the potential to disrupt positive opportunities, as the mother (PMK) of Brooke recalled:

[Brooke] did get a good job [...] and met up with a girl there that was worse than her and, ended up basically getting worse and more involved with drugs and stuff.

As seen in Brooke's narrative, a susceptibility to unhelpful influences or a negative network was the most common barrier inhibiting the

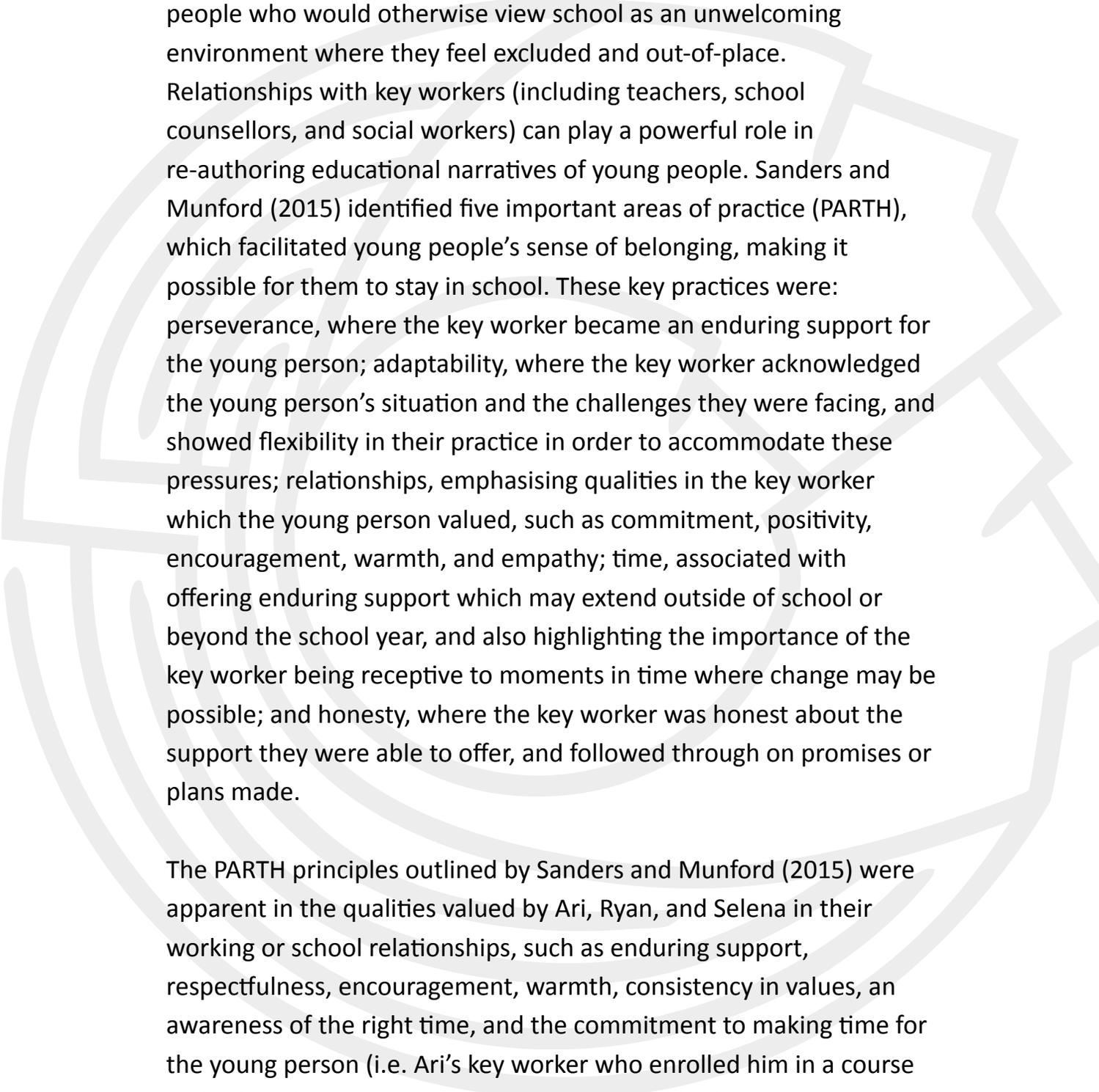
young person from getting back on track or from ceasing to rely on potentially harmful coping strategies. This negative network could be a peer network or it could be other harmful influences impeding the young person's development, such as an emotionally or physically abusive partner or family member.

Discussion

Young people in the Youth Transitions Study already faced an accumulation of life disadvantages (Elder, 1998: 3) and a chronic lack of their needs being met in many areas of their lives. This meant that the occurrence of chance events or opportunities could have dramatic consequences, both positive and negative. Factors which contributed to a positive change for young people were varied, as were factors which hindered a young person's desire to make changes. A young person could have strong supports in place, but this was often not enough to desist from offending or risk taking behaviour. Inconsistent support was particularly problematic. Where a young person's behaviour improved over time, or where the young person ceased to be reliant on potentially harmful coping strategies, a combination of outside support and resources, and personal resources, were identified as facilitative. Supportive relationships also aided in buffering a young person's self-confidence and were important in the young person finding a sense of belonging when they were facing challenges. However, supportive relationships could also be unhelpful, such as peer or familial networks which supported the young person and provided them with a sense of belonging, yet also encouraged or intensified challenging behaviour (Dewhurst, Munford, and Sanders, 2014: 45-47). Where other relationships were lacking, peer networks and partners provided support to many young people when faced with unexpected challenges. The strength of attachment with peers and partners could make it difficult for a young person to resist unhelpful influences without completely

removing themselves from a relationship or network, as was the case with Sara. Chance events may provide periods of reflection where positive changes could be put into place, but enduring positive change tended to rely on a substitution of unhelpful networks with other strong, supportive relationships, or the strong support of other relationships to counteract unhelpful influences. This can be seen in the narrative of Andy, where parenthood strengthened his familial network, sufficiently counteracting the influence of his peers. Andy was able to maintain contact with his peer network in later interviews, but did not get caught up in their criminal activity.

Dewhurst, Munford, and Sanders (2014: 42) found that behaviour was one way young people regained a sense of agency. Behaviour which may be perceived as delinquent, is often indicative of a hidden resilience (Ungar, 2015), and makes sense when the underlying complexities of the young person's circumstances are understood (Dewhurst, Munford, and Sanders, 2014; Ungar, 2015). In this report, relationships surrounding a young person were found to be strong predictors of behaviour. Where a young person lacked supportive, trusting relationships within their biological family, chance encounters such as key workers (including caregivers, mentors, youth workers, tutors, teachers, or social workers) could play an important role in offering a young person pro-social role modelling. However, inconsistent relationships were problematic. When trusting relationships were broken this could contribute to the young person's reliance on potentially harmful coping strategies and negatively affect their attachment with other relationships (Dewhurst, Munford, and Sanders, 2014; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005: 150). This was the case with Levi, who found it hard to trust other adults after a chance event led to his adoptive parents putting him back in care, and Kahu, who returned to his gang network when his mentor's contact with him became infrequent.



Sanders and Munford (2015) stress that a sense of belonging is a critical element in “re-authoring educational narratives” of young people who would otherwise view school as an unwelcoming environment where they feel excluded and out-of-place. Relationships with key workers (including teachers, school counsellors, and social workers) can play a powerful role in re-authoring educational narratives of young people. Sanders and Munford (2015) identified five important areas of practice (PARTH), which facilitated young people’s sense of belonging, making it possible for them to stay in school. These key practices were: perseverance, where the key worker became an enduring support for the young person; adaptability, where the key worker acknowledged the young person’s situation and the challenges they were facing, and showed flexibility in their practice in order to accommodate these pressures; relationships, emphasising qualities in the key worker which the young person valued, such as commitment, positivity, encouragement, warmth, and empathy; time, associated with offering enduring support which may extend outside of school or beyond the school year, and also highlighting the importance of the key worker being receptive to moments in time where change may be possible; and honesty, where the key worker was honest about the support they were able to offer, and followed through on promises or plans made.

The PARTH principles outlined by Sanders and Munford (2015) were apparent in the qualities valued by Ari, Ryan, and Selena in their working or school relationships, such as enduring support, respectfulness, encouragement, warmth, consistency in values, an awareness of the right time, and the commitment to making time for the young person (i.e. Ari’s key worker who enrolled him in a course on his behalf). These qualities were also beneficial in motivating Ari, Ryan, and Selena to stay in education or employment, build social support and self-confidence, practice their decision-making, and

engage in pro-social activity (Jennings et al., 2006: 32-33), aspects beneficial in developing a sense of agency (Munford and Sanders, 2014: 11).

Conclusion

Chance intercepted the lives of young people in the Youth Transitions Study in a variety of ways. Chance encounters (such as key workers or new partners) may offer the young person opportunities, support, or resources they would not otherwise have had. These encounters became turning points for many young people.

Often, a chance opportunity had the potential to engage the young person in education or employment where other pathways to education and employment had become narrow or inaccessible due to a lack of resources or other disadvantages. Although opportunities were not always positive in the long-run, they often aided the young person in developing their skills and self-confidence, and contributed to the young person's self-narrative. The young people's personal resources, such as self-confidence, determination, perseverance, communication skills, decision-making, and an ability to build social support, were found to be facilitative in enabling a young person to recognise and take advantage of opportunities. However, personal resources were most effective in tandem with relational factors. Reciprocity, trust, and emotional and practical support from key relationships were found to strengthen a young person's inner resources and the likeliness they would take advantage of opportunities or persevere with goals.

When faced with challenges, young people endeavoured to build agency in a number of ways. Asserting the need to cope with

challenges in their own way was one way in which young people found a sense of agency. Services, particularly trusting relationships with key workers (including youth workers, teachers, counsellors, social workers, tutors, or caregivers), could play an important role in offering a young person opportunities to develop a pro-social sense of agency. However, for these relationships to effectively counteract unhelpful influences in the young person's life and for young people to make the most of opportunities, it was imperative that significant adults took the time to understand the complex needs of the young person and maintain enduring connections when the young person was facing challenges.

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