

## Young Faces

### Who are the youth in New Zealand's Pathways to Resilience Study?

Between 2009-2010 approximately 1500 young New Zealanders were interviewed<sup>1</sup>. After being matched for age, gender and ethnicity they comprised two equal groups of 605 youth in each group, one group was using a number of services, the other group was not<sup>2</sup>. They are referred to as multiple service users and comparison group. They were all aged 12-17, half are Maori (48%), a third Pakeha (31%) and more are male (63%).

The overall goal of the study was to find out what helped multiple service users succeed in life.

### Relationships:

The two groups came from very different living situations. Few multiple service users lived with both parents (17%) compared to 52% of the comparison group who lived with both parents. 27% of multiple service users had slept on the streets for 3 nights or more in a row in the past year. Youth were asked who had primary responsibility for making decisions in their life (a 'mother' and a 'father' figure); a quarter of multiple service users did not choose their biological mother as a 'mother figure' (27%) and almost half (44%) did not choose their biological father (compared to 11% and 24% of the comparison group). 43% of multiple service users said they were 'not close at all' to one of the parental figures they chose (13% not close to mothers, 30% fathers). They said these people were less affectionate than was the case for comparison group youth, with a proportion saying they got no affection at all (8% mother figure and 22% father figure compared to 2% and 9% of the comparison group saying they got no affection at all). Multiple service using youth also appeared to form intimate relationships with a higher frequency than their comparison group counterparts.



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<sup>1</sup> Greater Auckland, Manawatu, Kāpiti/Horowhenua, Greater Wellington, Christchurch, Otago.

<sup>2</sup> Services are Child Welfare, including care and protection, Youth Justice and Alternative Education services and mental health services provided by both statutory and NGO providers.

## **School:**

The two groups had a very different experience of school. 64% of multiple service users stopped attending school by year 10 (form 4). Under half (47%) had achieved NCEA Level 1, which is a key entry point for later qualifications. One third (34%) remained positive about their last/current school, and one third (37%) retained a sense of belonging to school. Comparatively 71% the comparison group were positive about school and 68% had as sense of belonging at school.

Leaving school was more often precipitated by school action for multiple service users where 71% were stood down, 67% suspended and 54% expelled/excluded. Only 18% of comparison group youth were stood down, 14% suspended and 8% expelled/excluded. Both groups retained a strong appreciation of education: 82% of multiple service users and 89% of the comparison group aspired to get qualifications. It is inspiring to see that almost all the young people interviewed retained such a strong appreciation for education. It would seem that providing stronger and supportive relationships while enabling them to remain at school is one of the key factors that will lead to greater success in life for multiple service users.

## **Service Use:**

Multiple service users were the predominant clients across almost all services. The most marked was the justice area, where apart from being questioned by the police, comparison group youth were almost never seen in the youth justice system. Multiple service users were 6 times more likely to be in alternative education, 5 times more likely to have special education services, 11 times more likely to receive substance abuse counselling, and 5 times more likely to be involved in general counselling. This was not the case with health services where usage was more evenly distributed.



## **Risk and Resilience:**

Several of the questions the young people answered were aimed at measuring both “risk” and “resilience”, the latter being those strategies/relationships/resources that youth use to

face challenges and achieve their goals. Overall multiple service users reported less resilience and more risk. The one exception was involvement in community activities and here it appeared that participation for the multiple service users had been facilitated by agencies.

### Statistical Summary:

Measure	Multiple service users	Comparison group
Living with both parents	17%	52%
Living with non-family	30%	4%
Living on streets 3 nights or more in past year	27%	4%
Did not choose biological mother as 'mother figure'	27%	11%
Did not choose biological father as 'father figure'	44%	24%
'Not close at all' to mother and father 'figures'	13% (mother), 30% (father)	5% (mother), 16%(father)
'Somewhat close' or 'not close at all' to mother and father 'figures'	41% (mother) 59% (father)	36% (mother) 50 % (father)
Got 'no affection at all" from mother and father 'figures'	8% (mother) 22% (father)	2% (mother) 9% (father)
Youth is a parent	3%	.6%
Left school by year 10 (form 4)	64%	10%
Achieved NCEA level 1	47%	81%
Positive about current/last school	34%	71%
Has sense of belonging at school	37%	68%
Stood Down from school	71%	18%
Suspended from school	67%	14%
Expelled/excluded from school	54%	8%
Desire to achieve qualifications	82%	89%
Use alternative education	6 times more likely	
Have special education services	5 times more likely	
Be seen in substance abuse services	11 times more likely	
See counsellors	5 times more likely	

### Experiences with services

According to the young people interviewed, resilience has a positive role to play in reducing risks and helping them improve outcomes. Resilience includes three components: individual,

relational and contextual/community. Workers can use these resilience resources to support youth to manage their challenges and achieve their goals.

There is a strong relationship between individual and contextual risk. Individual risk includes things such as use of drugs, mental health issues, fighting, tagging, stealing etc. Contextual risk includes things such as family and community safety issues.

It appears that when both individual and contextual risks are high services find it hard to intervene effectively to support young people. This means that successful work with young people needs to take into account the ways in which risks in young people's environments impact upon their ability to be safe.

Young people's reports about service experiences suggested that when these are consistently positive they achieve better outcomes across a broad spectrum that includes the things they achieve as well as their feelings about themselves, the opportunities available to them and optimism for their futures.

Young people with higher risk tend to have inconsistent or negative service experiences.

Young people with higher resilience tend to have consistently positive service experiences.

These findings mean that workers need to spend time understanding the unique ways in which risk and resilience work in each young person's life and to plan their support around this. It means that they need to work closely with the other agencies that are involved in youth lives so that the overall work is consistent and responds to the specific needs and experiences of the young person.

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