

The Pathways to Resilience Research Project (New Zealand):
Whāia to huanui kia toa

Young people's relationships with siblings

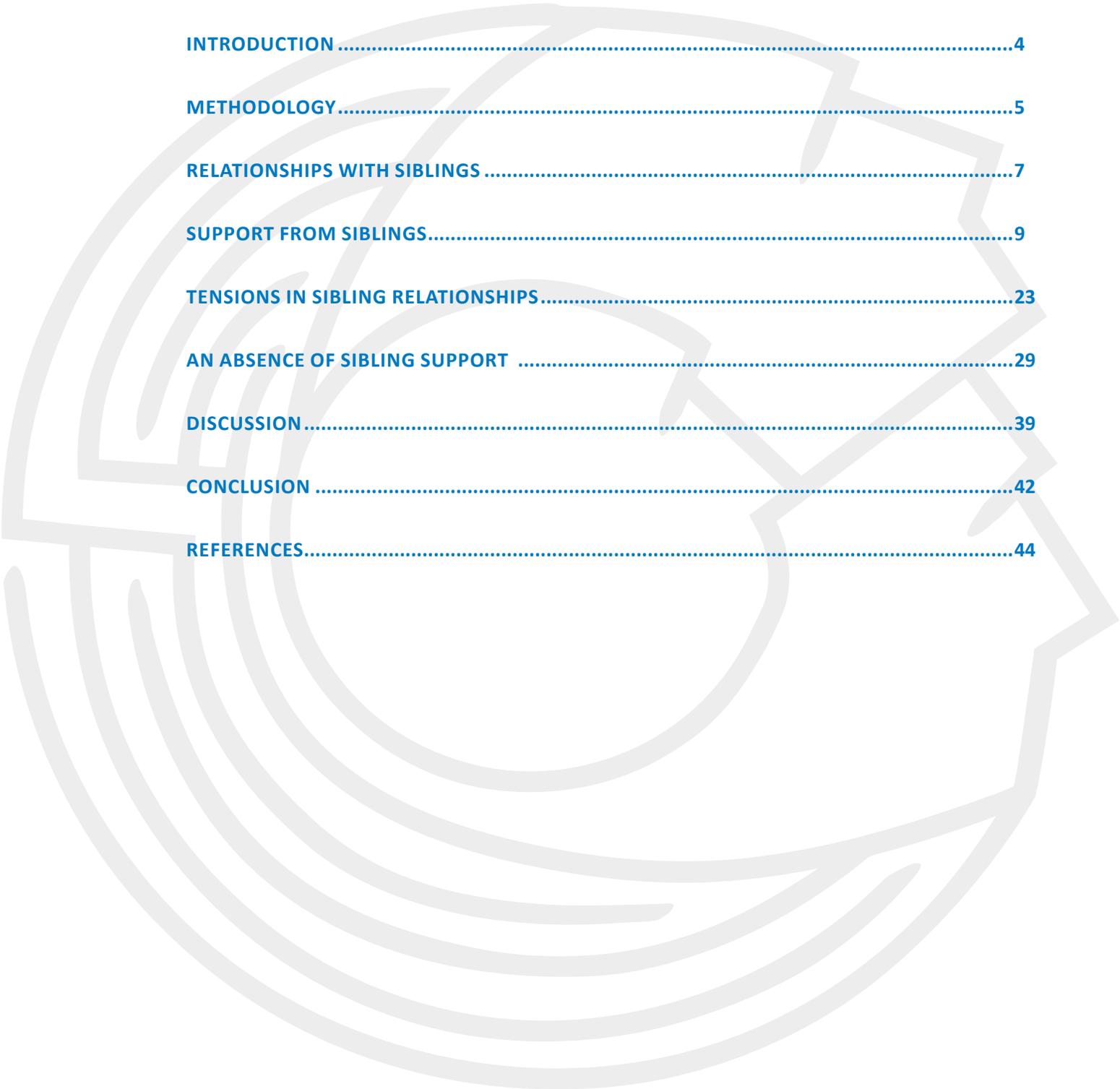
Technical Report 20

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INTRODUCTION

The data presented in this paper was collected as part of a larger study, the Pathways to Resilience Research Program, a five-country (Canada, China, Colombia, South Africa, and New Zealand), mixed methods study of youth resilience and risk. Data for the study was gathered between 2009 and 2013. Linked to its parent study based at the Resilience Research Centre in Halifax Canada, these were the first studies anywhere in the world that investigated the ways in which experiences across service systems influenced outcomes for youth with complex needs. Taking an ecological and youth-centred perspective, the research not only considers multiple service experiences, it also takes account of patterns within the social and material environment as well as interpersonal relationships within the lives of youth who are clients of multiple services. In this way it focuses on explaining the ways in which youth 'negotiate' for, and 'navigate' (Ungar et al., 2013) towards the social determinants of wellbeing with their families/whānau and the service systems that provide them with support, treatment and care.

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors that were related to the achievement of positive outcomes for youth who were users of multiple services. These were very vulnerable young people who faced a complex mix of challenges in navigating safe pathways through adolescence and into adulthood (Allard, 2007; Berzin, 2010; Rogers, 2011; Stein, et al., 2011). The study had a particular interest in explaining the ways in which the risks confronted by these youth, their resilience and wider social ecologies, combined with supportive and remedial services to create different patterns in outcomes. While data was collected from a number of sources, the research placed a particular priority upon providing spaces for youth themselves to explain their own experiences and to reflect upon the factors that made a positive difference in their lives (Bolzan & Gale, 2012;

Bottrell, 2009; Fleming, 2011; McLaren, 2002; Munford & Sanders, 2004; Sanders & Munford, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

The research programme was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee prior to fieldwork commencing (MUHEC approval 08/33). In addition to this University Ethical approval, ethical approval was secured from any organisation that supported the research in terms of either facilitating access to assist with recruitment or providing access to information such as case file data (see file reviews technical reports). This included Research Access Committee (RAC) approval from the Ministry of Social Development, approval from the Department of Corrections, District Health Boards, as well as approvals from schools and a wide range of NGO organisations that supported the research. The research has several distinct components:

- A survey of Multiple Service Using (MSU) and Comparison Group (CG) youth aged between 12 and 17 years;
- A survey of adults nominated by MSU youth as knowing the most about them (PMK - person most knowledgeable);
- Qualitative interviews with a subsample of MSU youth and their PMK;
- Reviews of case files held by a range of organisations that worked with the subsample of MSU youth.

Taken together, these four components constituted the New Zealand Pathways to Resilience Study. The study built upon the Canadian Pathways to Resilience study (<http://resilienceproject.org/>).

In total data from 1477 youth forms the basis for the research. All of these youth completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the study.

This figure of 1477 was composed of 872 youth who formed a comparison group, and 605 (40%) youth who were the primary focus of the investigation. The 605 youth were purposefully selected because they were concurrent clients of two or more service systems; they were multiple-service using youth. The service systems included: mental health, youth justice, child welfare and educational services additional to mainstream classroom programmes. These services were provided by both statutory and non-governmental (NGO) providers. Youth were recruited into the qualitative sample, which is the focus of this paper, from the 605 multiple-service using youth on the basis of their risk and resilience scores in the survey phase. Youth who scored above the mean on a composite risk measure and who also either scored above the mean on a resilience measure or below the mean on this measure were interviewed for the qualitative phase ($n = 109$). Youth were interviewed by trained interviewers, and a semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the interview which covered topics such as relationships with family/whānau and peers, experiences of school and other services, the risks youth identified in their lives and how they managed these, their definitions of what it would mean to achieve successful outcomes, their understanding of health and wellbeing, and their suggestions about how effective services could be provided. Youth were interviewed individually in a location of their choosing. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Youth were also asked to nominate a person who knew the most about them (PMK), and this person completed a qualitative interview as well. Finally, youth were asked to give permission for researchers to access up to four of their service case files and 291 files were reviewed as part of this process. The current paper focuses on youth in the New Zealand sample and specifically on a subset of 109 youth whose data was used for the qualitative phase of the investigation.

Ungar and colleagues (2013) argue that in order for youth to achieve

positive outcomes, resources need to be activated around them that reduce risks at the same time as support is provided which enables them to harness their own resilience resources. Youth who are most at risk of poor outcomes are typically clients of more than one service (Garland et al., 2003; Hazen et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2013; Loeber et al., 1998) however, neither the significance of links between education, child welfare, mental health and youth justice system engagement nor the ways in which youth and their families/whānau experience accessing resources and supports from multiple service systems, have been systematically investigated. The Pathways to Resilience Research Programme seeks to address this gap in knowledge and the current paper focuses on one part of this larger research endeavour.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SIBLINGS

This paper examines patterns that emerged from the analysis of one thematic node in the qualitative data set, young people's narratives about their relationships with their families/whānau. This paper focuses on young people's narratives about their relationships with their siblings. A separate paper addresses young people's narratives about their relationships with their parents/caregivers (see Dewhurst et al., 2014a).

Families/whānau constitute the primary context in which children grow up; parents/caregivers and siblings are the most important people in a child's life (Bolen, 2005; Frederick & Goddard, 2008; Holland & Crowley, 2013; Munford et al., 2013). Family/whānau are responsible for nurturing and caring for children, providing a sense of identity and belonging, and guiding the development of social norms and values (Families Commission, 2014). Within the family/whānau context, siblings have a unique relationship with one another. Siblings are often close in age and in physical location, allowing children to

experiment with peer relationships and build an understanding of how relational factors such as reciprocity, support, isolation, cooperation and competition work in relationships (Brody, 2004; Gass et al., 2007; Sanders, 2004). Often, older siblings can be important role models in children's lives, while younger siblings can provide children with a sense of responsibility and importance (Brody, 2004; Sanders, 2004; Waid, 2014). When young people are separated from their siblings, for example if they are placed into separate foster care placements, this can have a major impact on their wellbeing. Young people who are separated from their siblings experience the loss of some of their most significant support people. This loss can lead to feelings of grief, worry and distress, and can be a barrier to young people maintaining a sense of connection with their family/whānau (Herrick & Piccus, 2005; James et al., 2007; Waid, 2014).

Young people's relationships with their siblings are complex. Siblings can expose children and young people to risks. Research has shown that children and young people who have older siblings who misuse drugs and alcohol, commit crimes, and engage in other 'risky' behaviours are more likely to engage in these activities and behaviours themselves (Brody, 2004; Fagan & Najman, 2003; Gass et al., 2007; Kothari et al., 2014). Conversely, strong sibling relationships can protect young people from some of the adverse outcomes they may face from difficult life experiences, such as parental mental illness, exposure to domestic violence, or being placed away from their family/whānau (Bolen, 2005; Feinberg et al., 2012; Frederick & Goddard, 2008; Holt et al., 2008; James et al., 2008).

The young people in the Pathways to Resilience research shared a range of narratives about their relationships with their siblings. This report explores these narratives and uses case examples¹ to illustrate

1 All names and identifying details have been changed.

the key findings that emerged from this analysis. The paper begins with a discussion of the support young people received from their siblings. It then turns to a discussion of the tensions that young people's relationships with their siblings can embody. The final section explores young people's narratives about the absence of sibling support.

SUPPORT FROM SIBLINGS

A number of the young people in the study shared narratives about the importance of their siblings in their lives. These strong relationships helped young people to feel supported, both emotionally and practically, when they faced challenges. For example, some young people's siblings recommended alternative education programmes when the young people were excluded from school, while others talked to their siblings about challenges they were facing in relationships or when they had been placed away from their parents' care. The practical and emotional support young people received through their relationships with their siblings helped them to make sense of their experiences, and helped them to feel that there was someone 'on their team' when they faced challenges.

The first case study introduces Aliyah, who sought support from her sisters when they were placed away from the care of their parents.

Aliyah

Aliyah and her sisters were placed into the care of an aunt when Aliyah was ten years old, having been exposed to alcohol and drug misuse, criminal activity, and violence at home. Aliyah recalled that being placed away from her mother was frightening and confusing:

I felt like a black hole aye, and I was just, I felt lonely and missed my Mum, and you know, had all these questions running

through my mind. Like, why did this happen? How did this happen? When am I going to see her [Mum]? When am I going to live with her again?

Aliyah was glad that she could stay with her sisters when they were placed away from their mother's care, as they were her biggest source of support. She felt that her sisters understood what she was going through, and recalled talking to them about her experiences and concerns. Even though her sisters were not able to change their circumstances, the emotional support they provided was important for Aliyah:

It was pretty hard for us, and it was hard for the oldest of us, Mel. She was old then, and knew what was going on, and she worried about us aye. We used to run to her every time we were scared or whatever and she'd say 'shit, I can't do anything, I'm young too, remember'... My sisters were the only ones that I could trust 'cause they were going through the same thing, and like, if I were to talk to a teacher about it they would like help me, but they couldn't help me in the way that I wanted help 'cause they don't know what to do, it's new to them. And that's why I tell my sisters, 'cause they say 'what can we do, we can't do anything'. I don't care. I just want to tell you, so thanks.

Aliyah and her sisters did not have regular contact with their mother throughout their time living with their aunt. This was hard for Aliyah to manage, as she wanted to maintain a close relationship with her mother; at the same time, however, Aliyah felt that her mother had let them down by exposing them to drugs, alcohol and violence at home. After two years of living with their aunt, Aliyah and her sisters were placed with another extended family/whānau member. Aliyah recalled this placement as being supportive and loving. She felt that this relative cared about what she was doing, and that they would support her to achieve her goals such as staying in school, even when

this was challenging. It was during this placement that Aliyah and her mother began to work on their relationship again, though their relationship remained somewhat reserved. They had regular contact with one another, and Aliyah began to talk to her mother about what she had experienced as a child.

Aliyah and her sisters did not return to their mother's care. Their relationship with her was often turbulent. Throughout this challenging period in her life, Aliyah's main emotional support came from her sisters. Their relationship illustrates how, when parents/caregivers are emotionally and/or physically unavailable, siblings can become the most important people in a young person's life (Holland & Crowley, 2013; Lee et al., 2014). Aliyah's relationship with her sisters was very important to her. The continuity in these relationships when she was placed away from her mother meant that she was able to draw significant support from these relationships, support that may not have been available if she had not been placed with her sisters.

Rebekah and her sister, Laura, also had a very close relationship. However, due to Laura's alcohol and drug misuse, their relationship exposed Rebekah to some risks.

Rebekah

Rebekah had a close bond with her older sister, Laura. She felt that Laura was the person in her family/whānau who understood what she was going through:

She knows what it is like, 'cause she has been through the same stuff.

Rebekah recalled feeling like she was always the 'goody-good' of the family. Her father would drink regularly, and her grandparents were

in an abusive relationship. Laura started smoking and experimenting with drugs and alcohol at 11 years old, and Rebekah, who was nine at the time, resisted these behaviours. However, as she got older, Rebekah also started to experiment with drugs, alcohol, and smoking. She managed to keep her activities hidden from her parents for a few months, and only told her sister what she was doing. When her parents found out what Rebekah was doing, they blamed Laura's influence. Rebekah resented this, as she wanted her parents to recognise that she had made this choice and it was not her sister's influence that led her to make this decision. She wanted her parents to understand that she was her own person and at times she could be 'naughty' too and did not want to be always perceived as the 'goody-good':

Rebekah: There was heaps of stuff going on in my family as well. 'Cause my sister; they all thought it was 'cause of my sister that I was playing up. But, it was just me being myself, 'cause they always said that I was like the little goody-good.

Interviewer: And did you want to show them that you weren't just a goody-good.

Rebekah: It was just me being myself. It was like seeing my dad drinking every day, seeing my sister with her boyfriend and all that. And I was like the goody-good.

Soon after Rebekah's 13th birthday, Laura was placed away from the family/whānau, as her behaviour had become too challenging for the family/whānau to manage. Rebekah struggled with being separated from her sister; the person she was closest to had been taken away from her with little warning or explanation:

My life has been mostly with my sister, we got separated though...she got put into [foster care], 'cause she was just too much for my dad. And then she was up all the way somewhere, I didn't even know where she was and I hardly ever got to see her.

Rebekah reacted to the loss of her sister by seeking love and acceptance from another source, a boyfriend whom she ran away from home to live with. Unfortunately for Rebekah, this boyfriend was abusive and controlling. He resented her relationship with her family/whānau and refused to let her see them. Rebekah struggled with this, but decided that she was having fun living away from home. When Rebekah ran away from home, Laura made contact through some mutual friends. She was concerned about Rebekah's relationship:

My sister used to come over every day and try and get me. And I would be like 'nah, fuck off'. I would be wasted, I used to like drink all the time. And she hated it how I always put him first before her.

Laura decided that she had to tell her family/whānau about Rebekah's relationship, and encouraged Rebekah to seek counselling for her experiences. Rebekah attended counselling for a short time, but did not find this useful. Rebekah's family/whānau contacted child welfare services for support, and Rebekah was placed away from their care for six months. Rebekah drew on her sister for support during this time as she felt Laura understood what she was going through:

She [Laura] was with other families and then it's kind of what happened to me. I was with other families. I got split up from my family.

Rebekah resisted service intervention; she ran away from placements and went to stay with friends. She did not like being forced to stay away from her family/whānau.

Throughout her involvement with child welfare services, Laura continued to be a significant source of support for Rebekah. Over time, their relationship changed as Laura became involved with a boyfriend. Rebekah recognised that Laura would continue to play an important role in her life, even if she did not always have time to spend with Rebekah:

My sister [has been there] through thick and thin, even though we fought. But she is not there anymore 'cause she is with her boyfriend. But she is always there and she is really close to me.

While Laura exposed Rebekah to considerable risks at a young age, she was Rebekah's most significant source of support. Rebekah felt that she could rely on her sister to understand what she was experiencing, especially when she was placed away from her parents' care. This support was critical for Rebekah; she knew that there was someone who would always be there for her, even when things became challenging.

Siblings also helped young people to make decisions that would benefit their wellbeing. Imogen had the support of her siblings as she navigated the transition into a new school, and then into alternative education.

Imogen

Imogen was the youngest of five children; she had three older brothers and one older sister, all of whom she felt very close to throughout her life:

[My relationships with] family are awesome. Spot on. Nothing wrong that. Of course we have our little fights and that, like we are brothers and sisters, what would we be if we didn't? Family's awesome.

Imogen recalled that having her older siblings at the same school as her made it easier to manage the transitions between schools, particularly into secondary school. She felt that she already knew people because she knew her older siblings' friends, which made changing schools seem less scary:

Oh, it was cool. Like I've got all my brothers and my sister were there [at secondary school] and I'd heard good stuff that they've said and all that sort of stuff. And people – like I'm the youngest in the family – all my sister's and brothers' friends already knew me. They're like 'Oh she's the youngest' so they look out for me and that sort of thing. It was cool, I loved it, like being in a big family you have all their friends.

When Imogen was in year nine, she made friends with a group of her peers who misused drugs and alcohol. Imogen's involvement with this led to her being expelled from mainstream school and enrolling in alternative education. Imogen recalled enjoying her time at alternative education; she felt supported by the staff and achieved her academic goals. During this time, Imogen's siblings continued to support her to stop using drugs and alcohol. She felt that they noticed a significant change in her behaviour during her involvement with the alternative education service. This positive relationship was significant for Imogen:

My brothers and sister, the whole family, reckon [alternative education] did the world for me. Like I know that if I was still at school I wouldn't have got my qualifications, wouldn't have even

got through year 11. I wouldn't have done anything if it weren't for [alternative education]. I was just slipping so bad at college that I just didn't care. I'd get detentions, someone would tell me to do something in class and I'd walk out. I was terrible. My whole family says they saw a change in me from when I moved from college to the [alternative education programme]. I grew up a lot there, I knew a lot more, and I was hanging out with better people. My family's real supportive, we're all real close.

Imogen's siblings helped her to manage her drug and alcohol use, and encouraged her to achieve her educational goals. Having on-going support from her siblings, even when she made decisions they did not like such as using drugs and alcohol, was important for Imogen. She felt that there was always someone who could encourage her to keep working hard at avoiding drugs and alcohol. Their support helped her feel safe when she faced challenges such as starting high school.

Noah received support from his brother who helped him to make positive decisions around his offending.

Noah

When Noah was 12, he was excluded from school for bullying other students, running away from school and 'making trouble' by being disruptive in class. His older brother, Aiden, suggested Noah try enrolling in an alternative education course that he had attended and found helpful. Attending the same alternative education course as Aiden was a very positive experience for Noah; he felt that the staff and students were friendly and supported him to stay out of trouble:

If it wasn't for them [Aiden and alternative education provider], I would probably be selling drugs or sitting in some cell again.

Noah also reflected that having a strong relationship with his brother was important in helping him to stay out of trouble with the Police:

I just hang out with my friends and my brother now... Family first man... My brother and me, we go to the gym, do weights and stuff, kickboxing.

Having a physical outlet for his energy was an important part of staying out of trouble for Noah. Aiden recognised this and encouraged him to stay involved with his kickboxing training. Noah's relationship with Aiden centred largely on their time spent training together; this practical support helped Noah feel that there was someone 'on his team' when he faced challenges, such as the temptation to sell drugs to get money.

Inia also talked about the role her relationships with her siblings played in helping her to make positive decisions about her offending. Inia recalled how she wanted to work with her siblings to try to stay out of trouble.

Inia

Inia remembered her three older brothers getting into trouble throughout her childhood. They were involved with the Police and all of them had spent time in youth justice residences. She engaged in a reflective process from a young age, learning from her brothers' mistakes, and deciding that she did not want to make the same decisions they had:

I used to say to them, 'I am never going to do that stuff'.

As Inia grew up, she found that it was difficult to stay out of trouble; at secondary school, her friends started encouraging her to leave school during the day, to fight other students, and smoke cigarettes

on school property. She felt that this was a fun way to spend her time. When she was 14, she was excluded from school and was sent to an alternative education course. During this time, she continued to spend time with her friends and started to commit petty crimes. When she was 15, Inia was sent to a youth justice residence for two months. She reflected on the decisions she had made that had led to this and recalled that being involved with youth justice services and experiencing the serious consequences of her behaviours was an insufficient deterrent:

I sort of kept doing it at the time, kept getting into trouble, because I like didn't care. But now it's like I don't want to do that anymore, 'cause when I get older it will be court and jail, not youth justice... My brothers went through worse things than me and ended up in jail and I don't want to go through that stuff.

Inia felt that her brothers' experiences of being incarcerated and separated from their family/whānau for extended periods of time was challenging for them. She no longer wanted to be involved with youth justice services, as she knew the consequences for this would become more serious as she moved into the adult justice system. In her interview, Inia explained that having her brother at home after he was released from prison would be a significant factor in supporting her to stay out of trouble because he wanted to break the cycle of offending and incarceration. She and her brother began to work together to support each other to make decisions that would help them achieve this goal:

My older brother is out of jail. He doesn't want to get in trouble anymore. He doesn't want to go back inside. So yeah, that helps me so I don't get in trouble and stuff. Stay home with him. Just go out when it's the appropriate time, like in the weekends and stuff, instead of going out on school days and coming back

wasted as. I want to get an education, because I am the only one in my family that actually passed my [NCEA] Level One.

Although her relationship with her older brothers exposed her to some of their 'bad' behaviours, such as their criminal activities, the support and encouragement Inia received from her brother enabled her to achieve her educational goals and make decisions that would help her to avoid further involvement with the youth justice system.

Some of the young people in the study identified the reciprocal nature of support in their relationships with their siblings. Ryder's siblings were very important to him, and he was supported to maintain a strong relationship with them, even though they were placed into separate foster care placements.

Ryder

Ryder and his four siblings were placed away from the care of their parents when Ryder was five. Due to his complex behavioural needs, Ryder was placed with different foster parents from his siblings, though he stayed in the same town as them. Ryder's foster parents became his long-term caregivers, and helped him to maintain a close relationship with his siblings. Ryder felt that this was important, as he wanted to be able to encourage his siblings to do well and have their support in return. He was particularly concerned that his younger sister did well:

I'd go over there [sister's house] and say 'look you're going to school whether you like it or not or I will come here every morning walk you down to school and then I will go [to school]'.

Ryder looked up to his older brother who was regularly in trouble with the Police, and encouraged Ryder to behave in a similar way. Ryder ran away from his foster parents so that he could stay with

his brother. Over time, Ryder began to recognise that offending was harming his relationship with his siblings:

He [older brother] was my mentor, I looked up to him big time... I definitely looked up to him. I don't necessarily look up to him now 'cause, it's kind of the other way, he looks up to me, and I don't want that, you know, he's meant to be the older brother.

Ryder struggled with the change in his relationship with his brother, recognising that his older brother 'should have' been the role model. However, he was able to come to terms with the fact that his older brother was looking up to him because he was achieving well; at this time, Ryder was 14, still engaged with school and was working at an after-school job. During this time he went to stay with his mother and step-father for a short period. During his stay, he formed a relationship with his step-father's other children:

I went to stay with my step-dad. There was another family there; it was my little sister, little step-brother. He's still my brother anyway... Yeah, I definitely love my family vibe. It brings out a different person out of me.

Ryder viewed his step-siblings² as part of his family/whānau; he was a role model for both his younger and older siblings and he also viewed them as role models for himself. He felt a strong sense of responsibility towards his siblings, even though he did not live with them. He felt sad at times that he could not live with his siblings, and on occasions ran away to stay with them. His narrative indicates the

² In this report the following definitions are used to categorise step-sibling and half-sibling relationships: when a young person's mother or father gets married to a person and that other person already has a child of their own, that child is considered a step-brother/sister since they are not biologically related. However if a young person's mother or father marries or is involved with another person and has a biological child with that person then that child is considered a half-brother/sister since there is a biological relationship.

importance of young people being supported to maintain a close relationship with their siblings while they are in foster care. While Ryder could not be placed with his siblings for various reasons, his foster parents worked closely with child welfare services to support him to maintain a healthy relationship with them. Ryder's reflection that he 'loves the family vibe' emphasises the importance of maintaining a sense of family/whānau even when young people are placed in the care of non-family/whānau members.

Mikayla supported her younger sister to make positive decisions about her education and the friends she chose to spend time with.

Mikayla

School was a challenge for Mikayla, particularly once she started secondary school. She recalled that on her first day of secondary school, she made friends with a group of peers who were supportive of her; however, she did not feel that she 'belonged' with them, and made the decision to spend time with her cousins who attended the same school. Mikayla quickly found herself truanting from school, failing classes, and eventually leaving school when she was 15.

Mikayla talked about the decisions that she had made:

I remember first coming to the college [secondary school] and there was a group of Pakeha girls and a group of Maori kids, and my cousins were in the Maori group so I knew people there. And some of my primary school friends were with the Pakeha group. So I hung out with the Pakeha group for a while, but then I felt like the only Maori with them so I wanted to go hang out with my cousins. And I made the choice, but if I had stayed with the Pakeha group I would have gotten further in college, 'cause they were a good influence.

Mikayla reflected that her peer group had shaped her experiences

at school. When her friends decided to leave school during year 12, Mikayla decided to leave, too. After leaving school, Mikayla found it difficult to find employment. She was concerned that her younger sister Ana would also leave school early, as she looked to Mikayla as a role model:

My sister is year nine now, and I am trying to push her into [another] group [of friends]. I shared my story with her. She was like 'but like, I can relate to them, like they have gone through the same things'. And I was like, 'I know, but you've got to change it, you're going to end up like me'. So she was like 'yeah, but I want to do a course like you, I want to leave school in year 11'. I told her 'I have been through how many schools, how many courses, and it's gotten me nowhere. The best thing you can do is stay in school and get your qualifications'. And she just decided to do that.

Mikayla supported Ana to continue with her education. Mikayla's early departure from secondary school had limited her options which meant that she found it difficult to find employment. She wanted to ensure that Ana did not make the same decisions and so used her own experiences to try to influence Ana's decisions:

She is the important person in my life. I want to make sure she goes on the right path.... Go to a different college; make the right choices, yeah. Don't get in with a bad crowd. And do what you want to do, not what everyone else wants you to do.

Mikayla recalled feeling that part of her role was protecting Ana from the challenges she faced, and helping her to make positive decisions. She felt that it was important that she fulfilled this 'older sister' role, and was a safe person Ana could talk to when she was facing challenges.

Siblings supported young people to overcome challenges in a range of ways. Their proximity to the young people, both in age and physical location meant that siblings were a critical part of young people's social networks (Sanders, 2004; Whiteman et al. 2011). Young people's siblings helped them to make sense of what they were experiencing, such as when Aliyah talked with her older sister about being scared while they were in foster care. Young people like Aliyah and Rebekah felt that their siblings were the only people who could understand what they were going through, especially when they shared similar experiences. Siblings also encouraged young people to make positive decisions about their education, drug and alcohol use, and offending. Noah and Inia felt that their relationships with their siblings were important in supporting them to make choices that would help them avoid further involvement with youth justice services. Young people like Ryder and Mikayla illustrated the important supportive role young people can play in the lives of younger siblings by encouraging them to make positive decisions. These young people used their own experiences to help their siblings make sense of what they were experiencing and to work out how to effectively make positive choices. Research has shown that siblings are critical in shaping young people's development; for example, through acting as role models and companions when young people are navigating new experiences, such as starting a new school, moving into alternative education, or being placed away from the care of family/whānau (Feinberg et al., 2012; Gass et al., 2007; McHale et al., 2012; Sanders, 2004; Stevens et al., 2014). For Aliyah, Rebekah, Imogen, Noah, Inia, Ryder and Mikayla, siblings were a critical part of their support network, particularly when they faced challenging experiences.

TENSIONS IN SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

Some of the young people in the study had relationships with their

siblings that were emotionally supportive, but which led to the young people engaging in 'bad' behaviours, such as offending (Dewhurst et al., 2014b). Karl's relationship with his brothers led to him becoming involved with criminal activities. Despite this, Karl felt very close to his brothers and he wanted to be like them.

Karl

Karl grew up in a large family/whānau, with ten siblings; Karl was the fifth eldest. His older brothers were his role models as a child. Karl wanted to be 'tough' and 'cool' like he thought they were. He started getting into trouble when he was 11 years old:

Karl: At intermediate I started getting into trouble... Mates. Smoking weed, and all that, smoking drugs, smoking cigarettes, assaulting other school kids.

Interviewer: Ok, why was that? Was that an angry thing, or?

Karl: Just the natural me... Following in my brother's footsteps... 'Cause you look up at them beating people up and think 'oh yeah, I wanna do that 'cause it looks cool'. And then I started doing it.

Karl was excluded from school when he was twelve; despite his parents trying to encourage him to return to school, he refused and ran away to be with his brothers and friends. Karl's brothers were eventually sent to prison. This was a shock for Karl; it was the first time he recognised that his actions could have serious consequences:

I started actually putting that in my head and thinking 'oh yea, I gotta be good'.

He went to stay with an Aunt when he was thirteen. His Aunt enrolled

him in an alternative education course and supported him to make positive changes to his behaviour. Karl enjoyed his course for a short time; he made some friends who he felt were a positive influence and was making progress with his education. After six months, Karl's older brother was released from prison:

After that, fuck, I just gave up on course 'cause my brother got out of jail finally. And so I went to hang out with him and then, fuck, just went, everything just went up in smoke. Started getting into trouble again.

The desire to be with his brother was very powerful and eventually Karl became involved with his brother's gang, committing crimes and building up his reputation for being 'tough'. Karl's offending led to involvement in youth justice services and he was sentenced to a youth justice residential placement when he was fourteen.

Karl's desire to spend time with his brother was also fuelled by a desire to move away from the tension that was building in his parents' relationship. Karl's parents separated when he was 14, which he found difficult to deal with. His family/whānau had always been his biggest source of support and he struggled to come to terms with the fact that his parents were no longer in a relationship. He started to commit more serious crimes following their separation and was then arrested and incarcerated in an adult prison when he was sixteen. Karl's older brothers were in the same prison, and they worked together to make sure they were respected by the other inmates. Karl struggled when he was transferred to a different prison, but found that being separated from his brothers helped him to behave well:

I'm doing actually good here [new prison]. In [old prison] I was pretty bad. I started having fights everyday 'cause I thought I

was tough 'cause I had my two older brothers there and they're way bigger than me, and I thought 'oh yea sweet if I want to smash him he'll do nothing back 'cause my brothers will, you know, jump in'. Yea so I was beating up heaps of people actually. Yea a lot of people and it was actually making me think that I was all that. But yea after all that, down here I've been sweet. I've been actually cool aye, good as, kept out of trouble.

Karl's realisation that being with his brothers led to him getting in trouble was a positive turning point for him; he began to feel that he could make changes to his behaviour but still retain a close relationship with his family/whānau.

Manahi and his brother also had a very close relationship. They supported each other to manage a range of challenges, such as when they ran away from home when Manahi was twelve. However, the challenges they faced, and the limited support they had, meant that they often made decisions together that exposed them to significant risks.

Manahi

In his interview, Manahi recalled that from a young age he moved regularly between his mother's and grandmother's houses:

I just jumped from my Nan to my Mum, back to my Nan, back to my Mum. Got in trouble everywhere.

Manahi had a very close relationship with his younger brother Kahu. However, Manahi felt that his older brother and older sister received more attention from their grandmother, and he resented this. He felt that he and Kahu were labelled the 'naughty' children by his grandmother and mother. When Manahi was 12, he and Kahu made the decision to run away from home. They felt that they were not

getting the care and support that they needed from their mother and grandmother; they were often not given enough food, and Manahi was required to take responsibility for the care of his younger siblings when he was at home. Manahi and Kahu ran away from home and lived on the street, where they befriended a number of other young people who they felt supported and accepted them. Manahi recognised that these other young people were the 'wrong boys' to spend time with, but at the time felt that he and Kahu could not stay at home. Manahi and Kahu became involved in a range of destructive behaviours, drinking, smoking and committing crimes with the young people they were living with on the street:

We started hanging out with the wrong boys, getting into the wrong crowd. Yeah and by the time we knew it we ended up with some criminals. Yeah, it started there. Being mates and then we started getting in trouble...Instead of going to school I'd take off early in the morning. And come home late at night... We'd commit crime, burgs [burglaries] and all that.

Manahi felt closer to Kahu than anyone else in his life. Kahu was there for him when he faced challenges, such as when they ran away when they felt that their family/whānau could not support them. While Manahi and Kahu were very close, they also encouraged each other to engage in a range of dangerous behaviours, such as committing crimes with the youth they befriended on the street.

Nikau also had a complex relationship with his brother. He received a lot of support from his brother, particularly around staying out of trouble. At the same time, however, Nikau's brother was offending, so Nikau received contradictory messages from his brother regarding involvement in criminal activity.

Nikau

In his interview, Nikau said that his older brother, Manu, was one of his key support people, particularly when he was in trouble with someone:

I had lots of risks, lots of things... Like being wanted [by people who wanted him to join a gang], people looking for me, getting asked to join in a gang... My big brother was looking out for me. I used to talk to him about it. He would come and sort it out.

An important part of Nikau's relationship with his brother was that Manu understood his challenges; Nikau often found it difficult to stay out of trouble, as his friends would encourage him to commit crimes with them. However, Manu helped Nikau to resolve these conflicts and encouraged him to say 'no' when he was asked to join a gang. While trying to support Nikau to stay out of trouble, Manu was involved with criminal activities himself.

When Nikau was fifteen, Manu was sent to prison. Nikau found this difficult; he felt that he had lost his confidante. However, Nikau soon found that his sister was also a good source of support. She was able to support him in meaningful ways to make positive decisions. For instance she helped him to enrol in an alternative education course after he was excluded from school.

Even though Nikau's relationship with his brother sometimes meant that he was exposed to risks, such as Manu's offending, Nikau continued to feel that his relationship with Manu was critical to his emotional wellbeing. This emotional support helped him to resist the pressure to join a gang.

Young people like Karl, Manahi and Nikau identified the strong bonds they had with their siblings. They felt that these relationships were

critical sources of support and they relied on their siblings to help them manage challenging situations, such as when Manahi and Kahu worked together to run away from home. However, their relationships also centred largely on 'bad' behaviours (Dewhurst et al., 2014b) with the result that the young people became involved with the Police and youth justice systems. For young people like Karl, Manahi and Nikau, the emotional support they received from their siblings outweighed the risks and challenges their relationships exposed them to.

AN ABSENCE OF SIBLING SUPPORT

For some of the young people in the study, the support they desired from their relationships with their siblings was unavailable. Some were separated from their siblings and for others their siblings were too young to offer meaningful support. In other cases a change occurred in their lives or their siblings' lives that meant they were no longer able to support the young person. Azura was a young person who experienced a change in her relationship with her sister. This change was the result of Azura reflecting on who she wanted to look up to as a role model.

Azura

Several members of Azura's family/whānau were involved with a gang, and violence, drugs and alcohol were often present in her home. When Azura was a child, she was abused by a relative, which left her feeling unable to trust her family/whānau. She felt that her family/whānau had failed to protect her from this experience. When Azura talked about what had been helpful for her in trying to come to terms with her experiences, she felt that her brother had been the most supportive of her:

He always puts a smile on my face when I'm down, he will do something ridiculous to make me laugh... He's always the first to notice when I'm down... He'll ask me 'are you alright?...' He just helps me with stuff.

Having someone to talk to about her experiences and knowing that her brother could make her feel happy and supported was an important part of their relationship. Azura did not have such positive relationships with all her siblings. For instance her relationship with her sister was complicated:

My sister... she isn't supportive. She would just put me down and not make me feel good about what I was doing. Like I'd get into a competition and she would be like 'that's dumb' or something and I would drop out... Because she was my idol when I was younger, like seven, it was like 'wow, I want to be like her.' So when she would say 'that's not cool' I would go 'okay' and stop it just so I could be like her.

Azura discussed idolising her older sister, and feeling inadequate when her sister did not encourage her in the same way her brother did. As Azura grew up, she thought about the types of people she wanted to emulate in her life, and decided that rather than doing everything to be like her sister she wanted to behave in a way that demonstrated her own unique personality. Her relationship with her sister became increasingly challenging, and eventually Azura and her sister stopped talking to one another.

Sometimes, a change in a sibling's life meant that they were no longer able to support the young person. Sometimes siblings' needs overshadowed their own. This was difficult to manage, especially when they felt that they also needed the support of their family/whānau. Kohini shared her reflections on this.

Kohini

Kohini started to find school difficult when she was in year nine. She remembered that she and her friends would get into fights, wag classes, and take drugs during school hours. During this time, Kohini felt that there was no one she could talk to about why she was struggling. Her sister, Maia, had recently become pregnant, and had left school. Prior to this, Kohini's sister had been the primary support person for Kohini. She found it difficult to manage at school without Maia's support, and felt somewhat resentful towards her, because she felt that Maia's pregnancy was overshadowing her own need for support. Kohini remembered a teacher supporting her to explore alternative education options, which she found helpful; however, she was disappointed that she did not feel able to talk to anyone in her family/whānau about this:

I wasn't that close back then to my parents or with anyone in my family 'cause, my sister was pregnant then and so I wasn't used to her not being at my school for my year nine year, 'cause she was the one I was going to run to when I got in trouble... When she left school I went straight to doing all the bad things. Yeah, so I didn't get much attention [at home]. I wasn't close to my parents then because they were too busy focussing on my sister 'cause she was still young and she was already six months pregnant... So I just kept to myself, did my own things, and stayed out of their way.

Kohini felt that she had to learn to manage on her own; she felt let down by her parents, and struggled to make sense of why she was being ignored by them. She often felt left-out when her mother and Maia would discuss Maia's pregnancy; this added to her frustration with her family/whānau. When she was 14, her father physically abused her after an argument. She ran away from home and stayed with a cousin for a few days. In her interview, she reflected that she

felt that her mother was so concerned with Maia's pregnancy that she was not aware Kohini had been abused. Kohini found it difficult to trust that her mother would protect her, and so went to live with an aunt. She began to seek escape from the confusing feelings she had about her family/whānau through drinking alcohol. Over time, Kohini was able to work with a counsellor to address her drinking, and she returned to her parents' care. She still struggled with her relationship with Maia, reflecting that once the baby was born Maia was too busy to spend time with her. However, she was able to accept that she felt a tension between wanting a positive relationship with her sister and resenting her for taking their parents' focus away from her own needs. Working with a counsellor was important for Kohini in coming to accept and understand this tension as she was able to discuss the conflicting emotions in a safe environment. She reflected that she could not talk to her parents or sister about this, and so having another adult to support her was very important.

Kohini's narrative highlighted how challenging it was for young people to continue to feel supported and accepted by their family/whānau when their siblings had needs that were significant. Young people with experiences similar to Kohini's often resented their siblings, and it was difficult for them to understand how this resentment could co-exist alongside a desire for a positive relationship with their family/whānau (Dewhurst et al., 2014a). It was important that those supporting these young people helped them explore this tension in a way that the young people felt was relevant, meaningful and safe.

Hazel also found it difficult to get the support she wanted from her siblings.

Hazel

Hazel spent her early years living with her mother, father, older sister and older brother. When Hazel was in year six at school, her parents

separated and Hazel went to live with her grandmother for a year. Hazel found this experience somewhat challenging:

[Living with grandmother] was alright but I was used to having my sister with me... She ran away and she lived her own life when she was fourteen.

Hazel felt that she had lost a close friend when her sister left. She found it very challenging to cope with this, and started to get into trouble at school, fighting with her peers, truanting from classes and drinking alcohol outside of school hours. When Hazel was in year eight, she was asked to leave school and was enrolled in another school for the remainder of the year.

During this time she lived with her father and his new partner, a woman who Hazel recalled as being regularly intoxicated and violent:

I used to be good when I was younger, yeah, I was good when I was younger and then my brother and my step-mum used to bring all their friends and drink and all that. That's when it started changing. That's when I used to go to my Nana's all the time.

Hazel felt that her older brother was unsupportive of her, and that his drinking had a negative impact on her wellbeing. She worked to find a way to avoid being around her brother by spending increasing amounts of time staying at her grandmother's. She decided to move back to her grandmother's when she started year nine at secondary school. However, Hazel was soon excluded from school for her behaviour, and went to stay with her mother so she could attend a school in a different town:

I went to my Mum's. She tried putting me in school there but it

didn't work so she told me to go back to [Dad's] and then I had to live with my brother. He was an asshole so I went to enrol myself at school... 'cause I didn't want to stay with my brother at home.

Despite not liking school and finding it challenging to achieve there, Hazel felt that her best option was to stay at school rather than stay at home with her brother. She felt that her brother tried to be a 'father figure' to her. She found this confusing and frustrating, especially as he had previously made her feel unsafe when he was drinking at home with his friends. Hazel managed her difficult and challenging relationship with her brother by finding ways to avoid spending time with him.

Kaia's siblings were not able to support her in the ways that she felt she needed throughout her adolescence. Some were too young, while her older half-siblings lived too far away.

Kaia

Kaia was placed away from her family/whānau when she was 12 years old, due to concerns about her behaviour. She recalled in her interview that her father told her he felt that he could not care for her sufficiently, especially once she started experimenting with drugs and alcohol, crime and truanting from school. She was placed into foster care and supported to try to address her drug and alcohol misuse and offending. Kaia felt that she did not have the support she needed within her family/whānau; her three older half-siblings lived a long way away, and her two younger siblings were too young to understand what she was experiencing. Kaia reflected on this period in her life:

Kaia: I made friends at intermediate and we were all drinking, taking drugs and stuff... Dad's quite strict

on me, so me and him didn't get on when I was doing that [drinking, taking drugs]. Dad just got sick of it so he called [child welfare services] when I was eleven.

Interviewer: Did you have any feelings that perhaps this wasn't right?

Kaia: Oh when I was taking off, going drinking and stuff, that's what I wanted to do. I didn't like being at home.

Interviewer: Did your brothers and sisters say 'stop it so you can stay home'?

Kaia: No, they didn't really understand. They were younger. I've never lived with my half-brothers and -sisters so they've never really been there for me. They didn't really know what was going on.

Kaia's siblings were not able to support her to make sense of her experiences and they did not understand her needs. She did not feel a close connection with any of her siblings, and did not like spending time at home with them. However, she still felt a sense of responsibility towards her younger siblings, particularly when her younger sister started to become involved with an older peer group who encouraged her to experiment with drugs and alcohol. In her interview, she said that she tried to support her sister to make positive decisions and stay engaged with school. She felt that her own decisions had shaped her sister's understanding of what was acceptable:

I think that if she hadn't seen me high [taking drugs] and stuff

she might have never ever done it.

Kaia had a difficult relationship with her older half-brother, who had also been in foster care as a child. She felt that he could have been a source of support for her as he had similar experiences. However, he did not approve of her decisions, particularly when she ran away from her foster care placements:

I don't really care what my brothers think of me, like I care, they are my brothers but yeah. Like Jimmy [half-brother], he just thinks he's so much better than everyone. Like, he went through all the same stuff as I did and he just snobs me hard out, 'cause he's got his life sorted, like he's got an apprenticeship and everything. But yeah, I don't really care what he thinks of me.

Kaia felt torn between wanting to be supported by her brothers (both her half-brother and her younger brother), and feeling that they did not approve of her. While she recognised that her brothers were part of her family/whānau, she separated herself from what she perceived as their disapproval as could be seen in her statement that she did not care what they thought about her. To balance this tension between her desire to have a relationship with her brothers and their disapproval of her, she developed a strong sense that she did not need to please everyone, particularly her siblings and that the decisions she made about her actions were her own concern.

Kaia regretted that she did not have her siblings' support to make sense of her experiences when she was placed away from her family/whānau. Throughout this time, she sought to support her sister to make positive decisions around her drug use and education. In contrast to young people like Rebekah (see the section: 'Support from siblings'), who were able to draw on their siblings' experiences to make sense of their own experiences, Kaia found that she had to

separate herself and establish a strong sense of independence.

When Levi was placed away from his family/whānau, he struggled to feel connected to his siblings, who were placed into separate foster care homes. He shared his story of finding ways to feel supported when support from his siblings was not available to him.

Levi

Levi and his younger siblings were placed in foster care when Levi was twelve. There had been concerns that Levi was truanting from school, and he and his brothers were committing minor offences. This led to child welfare services becoming involved, and Levi and his brothers were placed away from their family/whānau. Levi recalled that it was frightening and confusing to be moved away from his parents as:

It was scary. Ah yup, I felt unwanted. There were a lot of things. I felt like I had killed someone and got into trouble for it. It was a freaky feeling. I wouldn't wish it upon anybody.

Levi and his younger brothers were placed into separate foster care placements:

My little brothers were split up. As the oldest one I had to go on my own, and my two brothers had to go together. From that point, we were separated. I went to [one town] and my brothers went to [another town].

Levi found it difficult being separated from his brothers; he recalled the many times he tried to run away to be with them. He felt that he had to protect his brothers and stand up for his family/whānau, and hoped that he would be allowed to return to his parents' care in the near future. He felt that being involved with child welfare services led to him 'losing friends and losing family'.

During his time in foster care Levi became involved with a gang which provided him with a sense of belonging. The gang provided him with support and he came to see the gang as a family/whānau. Levi recalled that he was becoming increasingly involved with gang activities. His feelings about belonging to the gang changed when he spent some time with his younger brothers. He realised that he did not want to join the gang, as his family/whānau was more important to him:

It was my little brothers. Yeah it was just family, yeah they turned me from going in [to the gang]. It showed me there were more better things than going into it [gang].

In being able to reconnect with his brothers Levi realised how important family/whānau was to him and the gang consequently became less important. He recalled hoping that his family/whānau would be allowed to live together again. In his interview, he explained that his siblings were his main source of support throughout his time in foster care. They were not physically present with him all the time, but their emotional connection provided Levi with the support he needed. He recalled that the people he lived with were 'caring', but that they were not family/whānau. Feeling a sense of belonging and connection with family/whānau was very important for Levi, and he sought this support throughout his time in foster care.

When Levi and his brothers were allowed to return to his parents' care after five years in foster care, Levi was 'stoked'. He was able to form a strong relationship with his older sister, who became one of his key support people. He was also able to feel that he had a closer relationship with his younger brothers. Living with them allowed him to become a role model and support person in their lives; this gave him an important status and a stake in the positive functioning of his family.

Support from siblings was not always available for the young people in the study. Sometimes this was due to a change in the young person's or sibling's life that meant they were no longer able to access or provide the support the young people wanted. This happened for Azura, who realised that she did not want to be like her older sister, and Kohini, whose sister became pregnant and as a result was not able to spend much time helping Kohini at school and at home. Similarly, Levi experienced a significant change in his relationship with his siblings when they were placed away from the care of their parents. Levi sought to replicate the sense of family/whānau he had previously enjoyed through joining a gang, highlighting the importance of young people being supported to have an on-going connection to their siblings where this is appropriate. Strong connections to family/whānau can support young people to build a sense of identity and feel that they 'belong' somewhere, which can help to mitigate the impacts of adverse and challenging experiences (Frederick & Goddard, 2008; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; James et al., 2007; Noble-Carr et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2014; Waid, 2014). Young people often found it difficult to accept the changes in their relationships with their siblings; they regretted the loss of the support of their siblings. Other young people, like Kaia, did not feel that their siblings could support them, and desired a closer relationship with their siblings. They saw their siblings as people who could play an important role in their lives, and regretted the lack of a close emotional connection (Feinberg et al., 2012; Frederick & Goddard, 2008; Noble-Carr et al., 2014).

DISCUSSION

The young people in the study shared a variety of narratives about their relationships with their siblings. Many featured their siblings playing key support roles. Siblings provided a sense of ongoing connection with family/whānau during difficult and challenging

experiences, such as when the young people started a new school or were placed away from their parents. They helped the young people to make decisions about their futures, and supported young people when things did not go to plan. Siblings also presented some challenges to young people; they exposed young people to risks such as drugs, alcohol and crime, their relationships were not always supportive, and sometimes siblings' needs overshadowed the needs of the young people. However, siblings were key players in the young people's narratives about their relationships with their families/whānau.

Many of the young people had relationships with their siblings that could be considered to be 'double-edged'; they provided the young people with significant levels of emotional and practical support, while also acting as a pathway into shared risks and challenges. Having strong supportive relationships with their siblings helped young people to feel that they were not alone in navigating challenging experiences, such as when Aliyah and her sisters supported each other throughout their time in foster care, or when Manahi and his brother worked together to run away from home when they felt their needs were not being met. However, siblings could also expose young people to a range of risks and challenges. Some of the young people recalled looking up to their siblings as role models and were therefore vulnerable to being encouraged by their older siblings to behave 'badly' (Brody, 2004; Dewhurst et al., 2014b; Gass et al., 2007; Kothari et al., 2014). This happened for young people like Karl, who wanted to be like his older brothers and started committing crimes with them to feel like he was *'tough'* and *'cool'*. Similarly, Nikau's brother was offending whilst trying to support Nikau to stay out of trouble. Manahi and his brother made the decision to run away from home when Manahi was 12; the decisions they made together led to them becoming involved with peers who encouraged them to commit crimes together. However,

Manahi still felt that his relationship with his brother was supportive; he felt that no one else in his life understood what he had experienced in the same way his brother did. Despite these risks and challenges, the young people felt that siblings were a critical part of their support networks; they relied on their siblings to help them make sense of their experiences, shared their feelings and fears with them, and looked to them for support in navigating new and challenging experiences like being involved with child welfare services or changing schools.

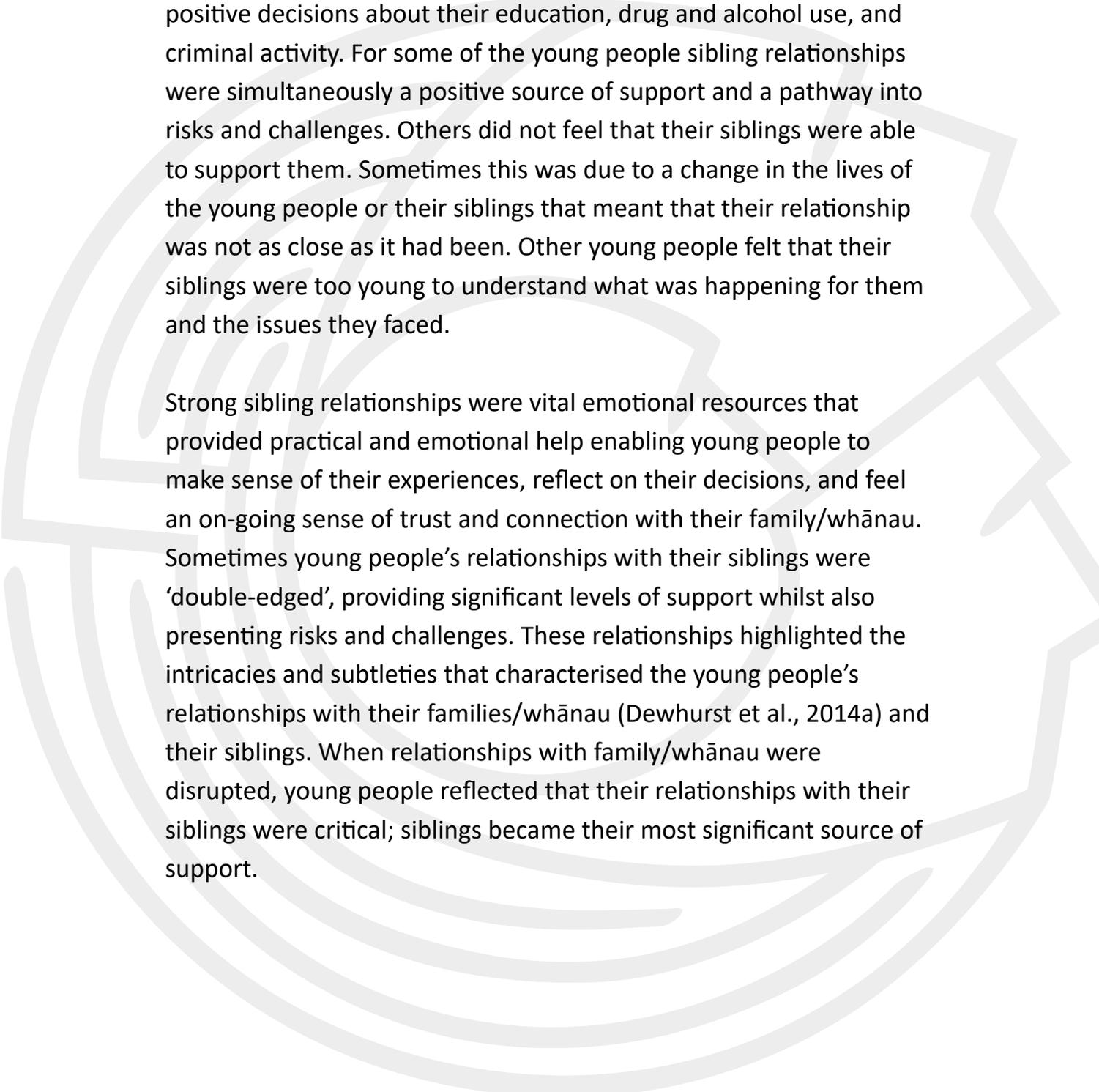
Being supported to maintain strong relationships with their siblings was important for the young people in the study. Even when their relationships exposed them to risks, such as sibling offending or drug and alcohol use, the young people felt that the support they received from their siblings was critical. One example of where sibling support was very important was when young people were placed away from their family/whānau into foster care. Being placed away from family/whānau was a confusing, frightening and often isolating experience (Dewhurst et al., 2014a, 2014c; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Lundstrom & Sallnas, 2012; Rock et al., 2013), and these emotions were often exacerbated when the young people were also separated from their siblings. When relationships with parents are disrupted, or when parents are unavailable to physically or emotionally meet their children's needs, siblings can become key attachment figures for young people. Relationships with their siblings can help young people to maintain a sense of connection with family/whānau, and can support continued attachment with at least one person in the family/whānau (Cronin, 2013; Herrick & Piccus, 2005; James et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2014; Lundstrom & Sallnas, 2012; Shlonsky et al., 2005). The narratives shared by the young people in this study illustrated this important point. Young people like Ryder were supported by their foster parents and social workers to have regular contact with their siblings, and young people like Aliyah were placed

together with their siblings. Their siblings became their key support people in making sense of their experiences. Aliyah in particular relied heavily on her sisters to help her address the challenges she faced; she said that she felt that her sisters were the only people she could trust to understand her concerns, experiences, and point of view when she shared her feelings and fears with them.

In contrast, Levi and Rebekah shared their experiences of being separated from their siblings and having irregular contact with them. Levi recalled feeling ‘*unwanted*’ and isolated when he was placed away from his parents’ care. Rebekah felt lonely and confused when her sister was placed into foster care; she felt as if she had lost her closest friend. Rebekah and Levi both ran away from their placements to be with their siblings and sought the emotional connections they needed through alternative networks, such as gangs and other peer groups, when they could not be with their siblings. In their narratives, Levi and Rebekah reflected that their siblings were critically important to them; they worried about their siblings when they were not together, and went to extreme lengths to be with them. This suggests that young people make conscious decisions about who they want to be with, and will navigate back to these people. Rebekah’s narrative illustrated that young people will do this, even when the relationship they are navigating back to exposes them to risks (Bottrell, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Sibling relationships were varied and complex. The majority of the young people viewed their siblings as critical and important people in their lives; they desired strong relationships, sought support from them, and viewed their siblings as role models. Young people who had close relationships with their siblings were able to use these relational resources to overcome challenges they faced. They drew on



their siblings' experiences to make sense of their own experiences. Young people also worked together with their siblings to make positive decisions about their education, drug and alcohol use, and criminal activity. For some of the young people sibling relationships were simultaneously a positive source of support and a pathway into risks and challenges. Others did not feel that their siblings were able to support them. Sometimes this was due to a change in the lives of the young people or their siblings that meant that their relationship was not as close as it had been. Other young people felt that their siblings were too young to understand what was happening for them and the issues they faced.

Strong sibling relationships were vital emotional resources that provided practical and emotional help enabling young people to make sense of their experiences, reflect on their decisions, and feel an on-going sense of trust and connection with their family/whānau. Sometimes young people's relationships with their siblings were 'double-edged', providing significant levels of support whilst also presenting risks and challenges. These relationships highlighted the intricacies and subtleties that characterised the young people's relationships with their families/whānau (Dewhurst et al., 2014a) and their siblings. When relationships with family/whānau were disrupted, young people reflected that their relationships with their siblings were critical; siblings became their most significant source of support.

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