

Research study into **Resilience in Young People**



Contents

The Project Steering Group	4
Foreword	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Conceptualising resilience	7
2.1 Defining resilience	7
Components and subcomponents of youth resilience	8
Conceptual map – links between components and subcomponents	9
2.2 Protective and risk factors	10
2.3 Problematising resilience	10
3 Methodology	11
3.1 Research design and questions	11
3.2 Research ethics	12
3.3 Data collection	12
3.3.1 Qualitative data collection	12
3.3.2 Quantitative data collection	13
3.4 Data analysis	13
3.4.1 Qualitative analysis	13
3.4.2 Quantitative analysis	13
4 Findings	14
4.1 Young people and their response to adversity	14
4.1.1 Adversity and risk factors	14
4.1.2 Reduced functioning following adversity	16
4.1.3 Signs and complexities of resilience	17
4.1.4 Building resilience	19
4.2 Relationships with family and friends	23
4.2.1 Family as a protective factor	24
4.2.2 Parental support and family unity	24
4.2.3 Non-parental support	26
4.2.4 Family as a risk factor	26
4.2.5 Impact of Targeted Youth Services on family support networks	27
4.2.6 Friends as a protective factor	27
4.2.7 Compensating for lack of parental support	28
4.2.8 Making friends	29
4.2.9 Friendship and increased positive functioning	30

4.2.10 Peer pressure	30
4.3 Community	33
4.3.1 Sources of community.	33
4.3.2 Sense of purpose	34
4.3.3 Sense of belonging	35
4.4 Local Area and Environment.	36
4.4.1 Nothing to do	36
4.4.2 Safety.	38
4.4.3 Local community	39
4.5 Education and feelings towards the future.	41
4.5.1 School as a protective factor	44
5 Conclusion.	46
6 Bibliography	48



Cover photo and photo this page, courtesy of Creative Youth Network

The Project Steering Group



Jack Nicholls
University of
Bristol



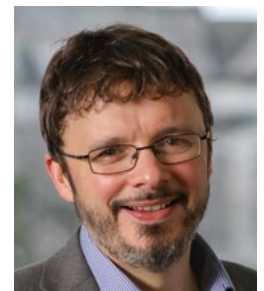
Jo Staines
University of
Bristol



Nora Pau
University of
Bristol



**Alexander
Paterson**
University of
Bristol



and previously
**John
McWilliams**
University of
Bristol



Lucy Gilbert
Quartet
Community
Foundation



Kate Gough
Creative Youth
Network



Bridget Atkins
Bristol City
Council



Carolin Peto
Bristol City
Council

The following students worked on this study:

Alena Chetwynd, Florrie Cole, Katie-Mae Davidson, Pippa Downs, Isabel Harvey, Zoe Johnson, Charlie Milner, Charlotte Ricketts, Chloe Shipway, Ellie Taylor, Finlay Turner-Berry, Shengyu Zhao

Foreword

In 2017 the Children's Strategic Commissioning team recommissioned Bristol City Council's youth services. At this time, the City Office were developing the One City approach and suggested the team to contact the University of Bristol to explore how the council and the university could work together to see what academic research could add to our commissioning.

Bridget Atkins, who was Principal Commissioning Manager at the time, was put in touch with John McWilliams, then Manager of the Professional Liaison Network (PLN) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University. Rather than simply employing an intern within the commissioning team, John and Bridget, along with the steering group, co-designed an innovative partnership to carry out an in-depth piece of research. This research would be an ongoing study over three years, employing groups of undergraduate student research interns to conduct quantitative and qualitative research through the PLN's Q-Step Internship Scheme.

The project has an academic lead from the University overseeing the work of the interns and the research proposal was approved through the University's School for Policy Studies' Research Ethics Committee. The theme of the study is 'Resilience' with the aim of developing two strands of objective and independent research into our commissioned youth services: firstly, the factors that build resilience in young people and how the interventions delivered through our Targeted Youth Services (TYS) support and deliver those factors. Secondly, identifying the factors that build resilience in organisations, testing the effectiveness of the new commissioning model used in the Youth Sector Support Fund contract, and whether it contributes to resilience in grassroots organisations to enable them to operate at a time of reduced public sector funding. Once the contracts were awarded, the service providers – Creative Youth Network (CYN) and Quartet Community Foundation – were brought into the research partnership. Their engagement and participation in the project has been and continues to be crucial. The research project has been up and running for approximately 2.5 years and to date we have employed 21 interns who have produced two initial reports, of which this is one. During this time the PLN, with Bristol City Council support, has successfully bid for further funding for both this piece of work and for other projects using this research model.

This report presents a conceptual understanding of youth resilience as explored through the experience of young people receiving TYS services provided by CYN. While this understanding of youth resilience is deeply connected to those who took part in the study, the insights demonstrate how real world empirical social science can clarify complex social relations and characteristics. It is hoped that this research will enhance the precision and clarity the term 'youth resilience' and how it is used in the future.

Our thanks go to all those who have helped support the research, including the Targeted Youth Workers and all the young people that have offered their time as research participants for this study.

The Steering Group

1 Introduction

This research report presents findings of one aspect of an innovative research partnership between Creative Youth Network (CYN), Bristol City Council, Quartet Community Foundation and the University of Bristol. The research partnership was formed in 2017 with the aim of developing a rigorous understanding of two forms of resilience: youth resilience in the context of local authority commissioned youth services in Bristol; and the organisational resilience of Voluntary Social Community Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Bristol. Both research projects are supported by Bristol City Council and the University of Bristol.

Using a mixed-methods longitudinal approach, the research set out to answer the question: *What affects resilience in young people in Bristol?* The aim was to develop a deeper understanding of the complex social phenomenon of 'youth resilience' and examine the effect of targeted youth services on young people who have experienced adversity.

Student researchers from the University of Bristol conducted 60 qualitative interviews with 21 young people, all of whom were receiving targeted youth services from Creative Youth Network. Alongside these interviews, 47 surveys were completed by 19 young people from the same sample to provide a quantitative component to the research.



The youth resilience research covered in this report focuses on one-to-one Targeted Youth Services (TYS) that are commissioned by Bristol City Council and run and provided by CYN. Thus, only one-to-one youth services are considered here; group work and other types of youth service provision carried out or sub-contracted by CYN were not included in this first stage of the study.

Findings demonstrate the complex and multifaceted nature of youth resilience. While every young person involved in the study had experienced some form of adversity, their responses were varied. Significantly, findings suggest that youth resilience is greatly impacted by factors external to the young people included in the study.

2 Conceptualising resilience

2.1 Defining resilience

In accordance with key literature, we begin to define a resilient individual as someone who has experienced trauma and adversity but who has demonstrated positive functioning (*Garnezy, 1971; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garnezy, 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982*).

However, although this acts as a useful starting point, youth resilience is a far more complex social concept. The conceptual map on page 9 breaks down the principal components of youth resilience. These components and constituent subcomponents were drawn from in part academic literature and in part from the data generated from this research. These components fall under five core categories:

- 1) Individual and their response to adversity
- 2) Family and friends
- 3) Community
- 4) Local environment
- 5) Education and feelings toward future



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

Components and subcomponents of youth resilience



1) Individual and their response to adversity

Mental health and wellbeing



Coping mechanisms



Adverse situations and risk factors



Turning point experiences



2) Family and friends

Family:

Emotional support



Family cohesion



Conflict and adverse family experiences



Friends:

Emotional resource



Compensatory support



Self-confidence and general wellbeing



Peer pressure



3) Community

Lack of opportunities



Safety concerns



No sense of community



4) Local area and environment

Various sources of community



Sense of purpose



Sense of belonging



5) Education and feelings towards the future

Importance of education and training to young people



Future goals and aspirations



Barriers to education



Routine and sense of purpose



Conceptual map – links between components and subcomponents



2.2 Protective and risk factors

Across the academic literature on youth resilience, researchers refer to 'risk' and 'protective' factors which affect a person's resilience and how well a person may be able to cope with the effects of adversity. Protective factors are defined as promoting resilience in an individual while risk factors conversely increase vulnerability to low resilience (Ungar, 2004; Masten, 2001; Luthar, 1991; Rutter, 1979). Risk and protective factors are explored by Michael Rutter's (1979) formative study in which he compared children from the Isle of Wight with children from an underprivileged inner borough in London. Within his study, risk was identified as one of six variables, the other five being severe marital discord, low socioeconomic status, overcrowding, parental criminality, and mothers experiencing mental illness. It is important to note that there have been criticisms of this work and questions raised on the generalisability of these findings.

Currently, within social care/youth work, risks experienced by children and young people are commonly grouped as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), namely physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, living with someone who has abused drugs and/or alcohol, exposure to domestic violence, living with someone who has gone to prison, living with someone with serious mental illness, and/or losing a parent through divorce, death or abandonment.

It is widely agreed that risk/protective factors are highly contextual rather than stable variables (Rutter, 2013; Ungar, 2011; Luthar et al., 2006). Factors that are generally protective might, in a certain context, actually be risk factors. This follows Rutter's advice that there is 'requirement to assess individual needs in relation to particular circumstances, rather than assume that all risk and protective factors have similar effects in all conditions in all people' (2013:476). Caution was applied in the interpretation of data within this research to avoid ascribing risk/protective factors to aspects of an individual's background outside of the young person's explicit interpretation of these factors. Accordingly, it is important that any conceptual model of youth resilience is not applied out of context or used to generalise about young people's personal lives that have not been understood.

2.3 Problematising resilience

Problems can arise with the term youth resilience and it is important to consider resilience within a social justice and equalities approach. As Angie Hart and colleagues (2016) suggest, resilience is a concept that can responsabilise individuals for their capacity – or lack thereof – to function positively following difficult situations that often arise outside of their control (poverty and abuse being examples). Therefore, resilience should be discussed alongside inequitable structures of society and embedded social disadvantage that can place young people in adverse situations and create an environment where it is hard to function let alone succeed (take, for example, the case of one young person participant who, in escaping an abusive stepfather, moved into damp housing that made them ill – two perilous situations which contributed to increased risk). Thus, we strongly echo Hart and colleagues' (2016) calls to not hold young people responsible for the barriers they face.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design and questions

A mixed methods research design that combined semi-structured interviews and surveys was employed to better understand youth resilience in Bristol, and how one-to-one Targeted Youth Services, that are commissioned by Bristol City Council, can affect young people's resilience. The following two research questions were adopted:

- **What affects resilience in young people in Bristol?**
- **What is the effect of targeted youth services on resilience in young people in Bristol?**

It is important to note that the focus of the presented here is largely on the first of these two questions. The inclusion of the second question was intended to draw connections to specific youth work practices to better understand the relationship between youth work and youth resilience, rather than to evaluate or assess such services. However, difficulties faced during the fieldwork phase of the research, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that it was not possible to collect sufficient, detailed data from the research participants to enable a longitudinal understanding of the impact of TYS on resilience in young people. The research findings and insights that follow should therefore be treated as a holistic mapping exercise of a youth resilience in the context of youth service provision. Ongoing research carried out by the partnership has re-focused on the relationship between youth work and youth resilience in the context of CYN service provision, and later outputs will address this. Furthermore, as a dynamic service provider that is committed to ongoing learning and professional refinement, CYN has been undertaking a review and restructure of its internal processes of monitoring and evaluation of service provision. This work to revise CYN internal systems of evaluation coincided with this research project, however, the two were not drawn together for this phase of the study. Insights from this study may inform CYN evaluation in future phases of the research.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

3.2 Research ethics

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the School of Policy Studies ethics committee at the University of Bristol. The ethical approval proforma provided details of the data collection process, data management and storage, along with other ethical considerations such as confidentiality and GDPR law.

A participant information sheet (PIS) written in accessible language, was given to potential participants (identified via a purposive sampling strategy and contacted by youth workers) explaining the stages of the research process. Young people were invited to ask any questions about their potential involvement in the study at this stage. Interested participants were then asked to complete a consent form to indicate their agreement to be involved and that they understood their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to not answer any questions they did not feel comfortable responding to. Partial confidentiality was offered to the participant, such that their involvement and personal details would be kept confidential unless they said something to make the researcher think that they or someone else was at risk of harm, in which case the researchers had an ethical responsibility to discuss this further with youth workers managers, the academic lead or the relevant emergency respondent. Paper consent forms were destroyed once a digital copy was made and transferred to a secure University of Bristol folder.

Before the research commenced, the researchers undertook GDPR and data security training provided by Bristol City Council on data management and storage procedures. Safeguarding training was also provided by Bristol City Council to ensure researchers would respond appropriately to situations where a young person's safety and wellbeing was thought to be at risk.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Qualitative data collection

Data collection took place over nine months between December 2019 to August 2020. For the qualitative data collection, interviews were held with 21 young people who agreed to participate in the study to track their thoughts and feelings over the course of four stages of their youth service intervention. Participants were given £5 Love2Shop vouchers for each of their first three interviews and an additional £15 in vouchers for the completion of their final interview, to acknowledge their contribution to the research.

Notably, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed stopped face-to-face interviews in March 2020. Further phone interviews were attempted, however many of the participants found this challenging and several withdrew from the study at this stage. This meant data collection had to stop before every participant could engage in four interviews. Despite some researchers adopting strategies for dealing with an incomplete data set, such as Last Observation Carried Forward (LOCF) and likelihood-based formulations (Karahalios et al., 2012), it was determined that these approaches to 'filling in the gaps' would not provide a true-to-life representation of the young people's voices.

3.3.2 Quantitative data collection

A survey was designed to quantitatively track changes in a young person's resilience over time. Surveys were completed online during the young person's one-to-one sessions with their youth worker. The survey consisted of 31 statements linked to the concept of youth resilience, which participants were asked to answer using a Likert scale: possible answers ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Individuals were asked to complete the same survey at four regular points of time throughout their engagement with the targeted youth services to enable us to discern any changes the young person experienced. An incentive was also given to survey participants, who received a £10 Love2shop voucher for completing four surveys.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Qualitative analysis

A qualitative analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken after data collection had been finished. A thematic coding analysis was conducted using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. Coding was guided by the four themes (Individual, Family and Friends, Community and Environment) identified from the academic literature, which provided a focus and framework for the analysis. New themes were also generated for data that did not neatly fit into these four categories.

3.4.2 Quantitative analysis

Surveys were analysed through a coding process in Microsoft Excel. The statistical software SPSS was then used to perform a paired-samples t-test for each theme, comparing the surveys to see if there was a significant difference in the responses. However, due to the disruption caused by COVID-19, the sample size was too small to demonstrate statistically significant differences; the results of these tests thus are not included in this report but may help guide our future research. Quantitative data was also useful for supporting the qualitative findings.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

4 Findings

Findings have been split into five categories, reflecting the sub-components identified in *Section 2.1*.

- 1) Individual and their response to adversity
- 2) Relationships with family and friends
- 3) Community
- 4) Local area and environment
- 5) Education and feelings towards the future

Although findings have been split into these five sections, it is important to recognise that each factor interacts with the others.



4.1 Individual and their response to adversity

4.1.1 Adversity and risk factors

The first part of this section focuses on the adversity faced by the young people within the study. This is a necessary starting point because understanding the considerable barriers faced by the participants conveys the ways in which resilience is often limited through factors outside a young person's control.

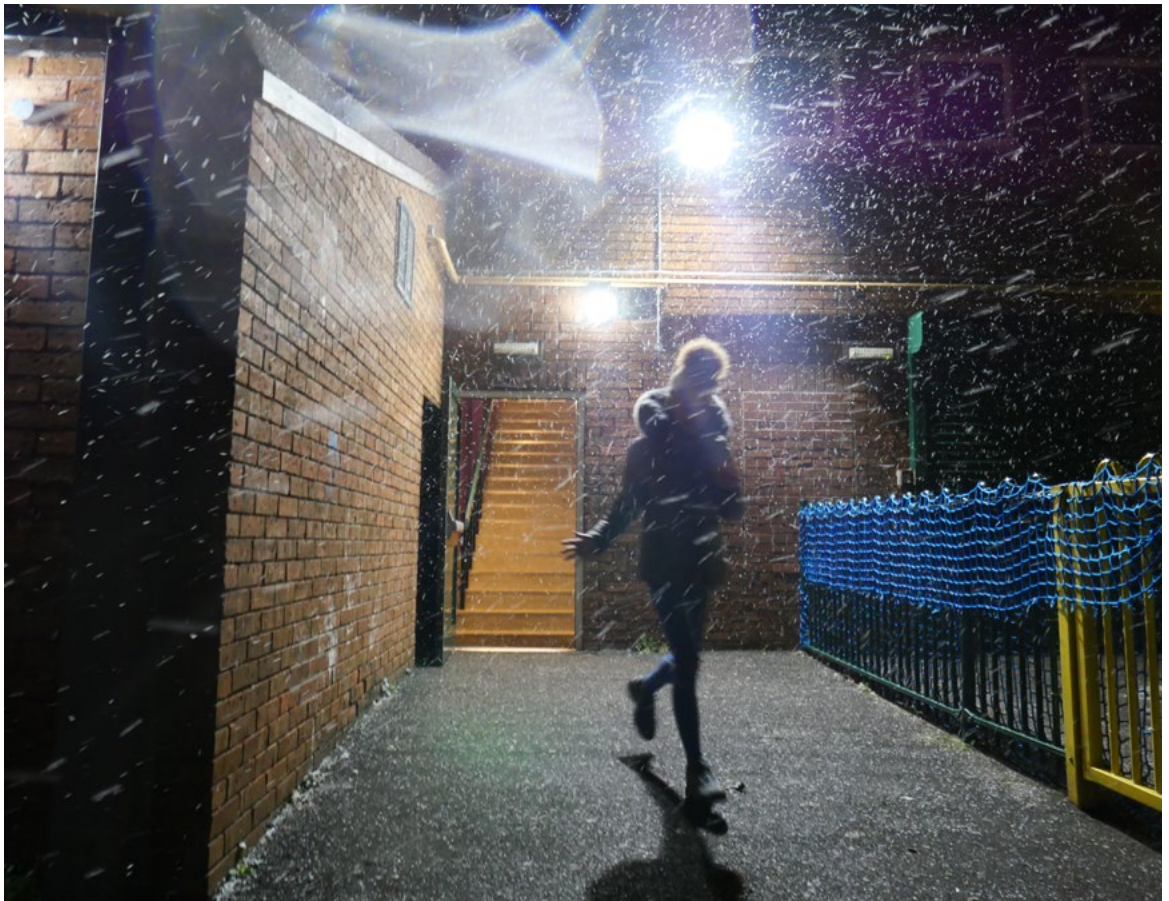


Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

Every young participant interviewed spoke of incredibly taxing periods they had historically endured or were currently experiencing. Examples of these included: illness of a loved one or themselves; bereavement; poverty; poor mental health; family discord; parental abuse or criminality; and extreme past trauma such as domestic abuse and sexual assault. In the first interview, young people were asked *'What are the main problems that you face in your life?'*

As shown below, the young people's responses indicate the varied nature of the adversities experienced:

Participant 1:

"My health, as I've got epilepsy and I don't know what's causing me to have the seizures and stuff like that, so I've been going to the job centre to get job seeking money to help me get through every month."

Participant 2:

"I'm normally a bit upset and depressed, so I kind of need to shake myself out of that and do more things to make me happy."

Participant 5:

"Family problems is the main one. It was bullying but that's settled down now and now it's family problems."

Participant 15:

"My anxiety. Dealing with grief is quite hard as well."

These risk factors and adverse childhood experiences can present barriers that may prevent fully 'effective' and 'positive functioning' (Rutter, 1979).

It is also important to consider the relationships between risk factors that emerged throughout the interviews, highlighting how adversity can often leave young people vulnerable to other risks. This is similarly noted in Rudzinski and colleagues' (2017) analysis of resilience literature in which they observed how 'daily stressors often overlap with other risk factors considered and comprise conditions or experiences such as living in high-risk neighbourhoods, poverty, homelessness, discrimination, school problems, family discord, and transitioning out of foster care' (Rudzinski et al., 2017:14). This was a common strand within the research, with several participants discussing the effects of their negative physical and mental health on their life, such as their ability to remain in school or maintain positive relationships. Young people also detailed the impact of difficulties with money or problems within the family that could create new problems for their mental health and wellbeing.

4.1.2 Reduced functioning following adversity

The emotional toll of adversity, understandably, made it hard for some of the young people in the study to enact positive functioning, a sentiment summed up by Participant 5: *'my whole brain just shuts down and I just go into meltdown mode'*. In the early stages of their interventions, most of the strategies young people employed in the face of adversity pointed towards reduced functioning. This became apparent in the second interview when the 17 participants who took part in two or more interviews were asked if and how stress affected their behaviour. The majority of participants explained that stress prohibited their ability to function positively, thus indicating a reduced level of resilience for many at an early stage of their intervention. Only two out of the 17 participants felt that stresses did not negatively affect their behaviour.

Rather than problem-focused coping strategies, aimed at managing or modifying problems or stresses, most responses to this question evidenced the way in which resilience was often absent when confronted with stressful and challenging scenarios. Anger was seen among four out of the 17 interview responses, implying not only the emotional toll of stress, but also the difficulty for many young people to respond to adversity with positive behaviours:

Participant 13:

"Yes. I can get angry sometimes, or agitated. Not violent, but I will shout or be loud, but I would never hit anyone, well unless they hit me."

Participant 17:

"Like I get angry, really easy if someone starts like on me in class or something like that."

Participant 5:

"Yeah, I think sometimes they make me a bit more, like – I either get angry or I just don't speak. I just, kind of, sit there in silence and just, like, don't speak to anyone."

Another young person suggested they would just 'walk away' from the situation, even though they knew 'questioning it and trying to tackle it' would be a more effective response. Although only one young person mentioned it in their response to the question above, the avoidance of issues was an extremely common thread within the young people's responses overall. Seven participants mentioned their use of avoidance strategies at the start of their intervention, as opposed to taking active measures to deal with the issues they were confronted with. For example, one young person said that, although they would like to work on their 'self-hatred and depression', they tended to 'just ignore [a problem] till it goes away'. This is a clear indication of how risk factors like poor mental health can prohibit positive functioning in young people. More instances of this are shown below, illustrating the extent to which avoidance strategies were frequently implemented by the research participants:

Participant 12:

"Normally when I'm stressed I will end up leaving the situation or walking away from it."

Participant 11:

"I tried to carry on for a couple more weeks but I just couldn't deal with it so I just stopped yeah."

Participant 9:

"If it's something that I don't really understand, I can act with confusion and I might try to ignore it."

Linking to avoidance, drug use was also cited as a maladaptive coping strategy used when faced with adversity, particularly by young people at the earlier stages of their targeted intervention. Indeed, this insight aligns with resilience literature where drug use is commonly presented as a 'risk factor' jeopardizing one's ability to be resilient, or drug use is seen as a 'maladaptive coping strategy', purporting one's lack of resilience' (Rudzinski et al., 2017: 1). Four participants in the study referred to the detrimental impacts their drug use was having on their relationships, mental health and functioning; all of which are key components of resilience. While the relationship for each young person between their drug use and resilience was different, each scenario was telling of the way in which drug use was a considerable risk within the study, something which no doubt limited resilient behaviours. All four participants initially opted for avoidance strategies or used drugs to escape.

Researcher: *"How do you deal with these challenges?"*

Participant 13:

"Weed really, that's really it. Sat in my room. Music. Nothing else really."

Researcher: *"Do you think you deal well with these situations?"*

Participant 13:

"Probably not. I could've dealt with it better. Just talk it out."

4.1.3 Signs and complexities of resilience

The overarching pattern that emerged from the qualitative data was that adversity considerably affected the young people's ability to enact resilience. Nevertheless, additional complexity was usually apparent. For example, several participants who reported maladaptive coping strategies simultaneously showed signs or levels of resilience, blending reduced functioning with more positive functioning. This blend of reduced functioning, as well as resilient behaviours, was seen among several participants, showing just how young people's functioning is constantly changing.

This is illustrated particularly well by one participant who indicated the ways in which they could be aggressive one minute (showing levels of reduced functioning) and positive the next:

Participant 14:

"The aggression and like the angry side of it, when we have these swings that we can't honestly take it, it can cause you to be so aggressive you don't realise who you are anymore. It's like it's one extreme to the other, it's like being Jesus one second and Hitler the next one, which is stupid."

Such insights informed the conclusions that resilience is never straightforward. Positive behaviours and attitudes were demonstrated by participants, even if they otherwise lacked resilience in some situations. It is clear that resilience is a complex dynamic that depends on many variables such as the mood or current social reality of each young person:

Participant 14:

"On a bad day – I feel like anybody's attacking me. On a good day, I'll know what is and what isn't good and what isn't bad and what, like, who is actually trying to start and who isn't. So, the difference between putting in reference to good days – bad days – I think it's – it depends on what day and what mood you're in."

Though relatively scarce, some participants did show positive functioning in the face of mental health and adversity at an early stage of their intervention, again pointing to the complex nature of resilience and how adversity did not always equate to reduced functioning:

Participant 20:

"I spoke to my nan who gave me a diary and I got these apps that help me like Headspace that like relax me and I can have more personal time to myself."

Participant 3:

"I guess, just like, seeking help from, like services and, yeah, I'd say that's one of the main things, and, like, talking to friends and, just - yeah, talking to anyone really."

Participant 18:

"I always try to make a list in the morning of what I am doing first. When you wake up and you have got so much to do and you don't know what to start with first, that always overwhelms me a bit, so I make a list, every morning, then I work my way through it."

It should also be mentioned here that young people illustrated signs of resilience by attending youth sessions and participating in this research process – situations that can be challenging. These situations require the young people to share personal details of their personal lives and have the confidence to meet – and then discuss sensitive information with – new people. So, in taking part in the research the young people each displayed a level of resilience and positive functioning. They were all motivated to try to overcome issues that they faced by working with CYN and receiving targeted support.

Ultimately, youth resilience is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Several young people showed reduced levels of resilience at the start of their intervention. However, this does not mean that those young people were incapable of being resilient or did not show resilience in other situations.

4.1.4 Building resilience

As discussed above, most of the young people involved felt stress and adversity affected the way they behaved. Maladaptive coping strategies – such as avoidance, anger and drug use – stifled resilience. However, over the course of the interviews it became clear that new coping strategies and problem-solving skills had been adopted by the young people we interviewed, potentially related to the support they had received.

One particularly striking example of personal development was seen in Participant 8 who, at the start of their targeted intervention sessions, struggled with social situations (exemplified by them tending to eat lunch in the Head's office to avoid contact with other students at school). As time went on, however, there had been significant changes in the young person's confidence. Having received targeted support, they were able to eat lunch with other people, despite their earlier avoidance of social situations and crowds:

Researcher: *“What have you gained so far from your one-to-one sessions?”*

Participant 8:

“I’ve been able to build more confidence and I’ve started eating parts of my lunch with other people.”

This type of positive shift was common. Significantly, all young people who took part in three or more interviews indicated a positive change in functioning with the aid of one-to-one targeted youth support. Accordingly, evidence was identified to suggest that this intervention had helped young people improve their competent functioning following adversity. In this way, targeted support can be seen to enable young people to create protective factors against risk. Reflecting the complex nature of youth resilience, youth workers provided support that was adapted for each young person's personal situation. Participant 5, for example, gained new techniques that they could put in place when relationships became challenging:

Participant 5:

"I've gained – I've gained a lot of, like, knowledge on things I can do in situations and, like, how I can help myself when it happens."

The young person had noticed positive changes since starting their targeted intervention, and was now taking time out to relax, which was beneficial for their mental health:

Participant 5:

"I've learnt different ways of coping with like stress."

"I think everything has become a lot easier 'cause he's [CYN youth worker] told me things that can help when it's happening and I think it's just made it a bit more calm at home 'cause he said to relax a bit more. So I've just been taking a bit of time each day just to relax and clear my mind and stuff."

The one-to-one youth worker interventions were evidently a place where young people could challenge and change unhelpful thinking patterns. The interview extract below came from a participant who had seen a change in their behaviour and mindset since their intervention as, with their youth worker, they had 'done stuff on challenging negative thoughts and thought cycles'. This provided them with new skills with which to respond to risk factors, such as implementing relaxation methods:

Participant 3:

"Umm yeah I think I've had a lot more like practical skills so like, breathing techniques and kind of like self-care like doing yoga and that kind of thing, and just like implementing that more regularly."

Other young people's accounts of new coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills are given below. Taken together these give a sense of the effect of targeted one-to-one youth services:

Participant 2:

"Well, I've started to do like, I've started to be like more active in working on my confidence, so like in school I've been like doing, like, some, like meetings, I've been holding meetings with my teachers."

Participant 12:

"I've learnt like how to control my anger a bit more and not like lash out at people."

Participant 14:

"My support worker [name withheld] he seems to have helped me find ways to cope with the way I am and also helped me find ways to cope without my medication."

Participant 18:

"He [youth worker] will help me come up with solutions and stuff and realistic goals."

Furthermore, all four young people who said they turned to drug use in the face of adversity reported reduced drug use by the end of the research process, again implying a move away from maladaptive strategies. A further four participants also concluded that their youth worker had advised them to be safer with drugs and helped them to understand the negative consequences of drug use. In one instance, Participant 6 had said they still wanted to take drugs, yet with the help of their youth worker, they had identified drugs they no longer want to do following education about their harmful effects ("I've found drugs I don't want to do anymore"). Furthermore, all four of these young people commented on the importance of one-to-one support for their emotional wellbeing, and for offering a space to discuss issues other than just drug use, highlighting the variety of resources targeted support can provide – whether that be educational or emotional:

Participant 6:

"I just – she just helps me. I prefer talking to [youth worker] because I find it easier to talk to her compared to other [counsellors]."

Participant 11:

"He understands. He's worked with a lot of people like me, yeah."

Participant 7:

"I would talk to her about anything, not just drugs... I feel like some, I have someone that like cares and wants what's best."

Participant 13:

"Like I don't really smoke as much anymore, I've cut down quite a bit. Having someone to talk to. I know now [youth worker] won't tell no one anything unless it's dangerous for me and I know that - but everything is confidential. It feels good to have somebody to talk to about things and have someone to help."

The mental health of the young people themselves was an important factor of youth resilience identified in the study. Youth worker intervention was viewed as beneficial for coping with the emotional strain experienced due to adversity, which in turn supported better mental health. Based on our analysis, it was also clear that the youth workers acted as an important emotional resource for young people by providing a safe and confidential place for them to discuss challenges and process adversity:

Participant 9:

"It's just given me someone to talk to about problems and all that."

Participant 18:

"It's really nice talking to somebody, it makes me feel better knowing that I have that session to look forward to in the week and then it's like I feel like I can talk to somebody about everything and then it's not like going on to the next week, it's really helpful."

Participant 6:

"He will let me say how I feel and he will help me come up with solutions and stuff and realistic goals which I wouldn't probably be able to do by myself."

One-to-one support offered an important space for young people to talk about and navigate their mental health and to begin to find solutions to the difficulties they were experiencing. This seemed to have a clear positive impact on the participants of this study, helping them lead happier and healthier lives. Overall, this section has highlighted the emotional strain that the young people may experience when facing adversity; how this emotional strain made it difficult to implement healthy coping mechanisms and resilient behaviours; and ways in which young people have been supported one-to-one through targeted youth support.

Participant 15:

"But, thanks to, [youth worker], my support worker, and everyone else that helps me – I am able to wake up in a better mood, I'm able to hold a real smile and wake up and have my Mum happy because she knows her son's actually willing to be here. And it's good, because not only is it fixing me, but she's doing a part of fixing my family as well."



4.2 Relationships with family and friends

The young people in the study considered relationships with friends and family a vital resource for coping with difficult situations and overcoming challenges – constituting a significant protective factor. Such relationships were found to increase resilience through emotional and practical support, as well as providing space for young people to talk things through.

The space to talk was particularly significant, as by far the most common answer to “What do you think is the best way to deal with personal problems?”, was to speak with others. The young people involved also related strong relationships to the improvement of several character traits and competencies that we outlined above as our proxies for positive functioning.

However, we equally found that young people’s close relationships had the potential to also act as risk factors. Accordingly, such relationships were linked to decreased resilience in several ways, such as negative peer pressure and limited family unity.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network



4.2.1 Family as a protective factor

Within the study, family members were the most frequently cited sources of support in overcoming adversity. When asked, “Who do you go to for support when you have a problem?”, eleven of the 21 young people’s answers included family members. Family was reported to provide a space to talk through problems as well as emotional and practical support against adversity. When asked about the importance of family, several of the young people identified support that came from the family unit. For example:

Participant 1:

“Yeah, family are important to me because they tell me what’s good from bad. ... They ask if I feel alright and, if I don’t feel all right, then help me out and stuff like that really.”

Participant 5:

“If I need anything, I can just ring them and you know, they’ll come and get me or they’ll, you know, make sure I’m all right.”

Participant 8:

“They’re really supportive and they help me get through situations.”

4.2.2 Parental support and family unity

The most frequently cited source of support within the family were the participants’ parents, meaning a key consideration in whether ‘family’ acted as a protective factor was whether the young person had a positive relationship with at least one of their parents. Six of the young people interviewed described having a particularly negative, fractured or absent relationship with their parents. None of these participants described their parents as a source of emotional support or stated that they would go to them when faced with a problem. In comparison, all the young people who described having positive relationships with their parents saw them as an avenue of support.

Whether young people saw their parents as a resource for emotional support also appeared related to the nature of the family unit. Initially, in line with the original intentions of our interview questions, an attempt was made to code for family cohesion and family stability separately. This was based on Garmezy and colleagues (1984) study which found family cohesion and stability to be key modifiers of competence in young people. Family cohesion, as defined by Garmezy and others (1984), depended upon frequency of family activities, level of manifest affection, presence of rules, and adequacy of communication, whereas family stability was related to the number of family moves, marriages, jobs, and upkeep of home. In line with this definition, there appeared to be a relationship between what young people considered to be a stable home and disruptive house moves (several moves or moving away from the family unit). Seven of the 12 young people who reported no disruptive moves considered their home lives to be

stable, compared with only one of the nine young people who reported disruptive moves. However, only one young person explicitly linked the two. During our interviews we found that young people most frequently related family stability to lack of arguments (six young people), generally getting on with other family members (six young people), emotional support (four young people) and financial stability – often related to food (four young people).

Overall, the common themes of a stable home environment identified by the young people did not fit neatly inside our original definition of family stability and drifted into parts of our definition of family cohesion. Given this overlap, it was challenging to analyse these factors separately. Accordingly, it was more appropriate to code for what was referred to as 'family unity', encompassing both stability and cohesion. This related to whether the young person themselves considered their home-life stable, whilst considering frequency of family activities, disruptive moves, level of manifest affection and discord between family members.

A tentative relationship was found between levels of family unity in the young person's home and whether they felt able to access support from their parents in overcoming adversity. Within the sample, young people who experienced high levels of family unity were more likely to report that their parent(s) provided them with emotional support. Three of the five young people who reported high levels of family unity regarded their parent(s) as a source of emotional support, compared to only three of the 10 young people who reported low levels of family unity.

One case which illustrates the potential impact of family unity on support available to the young person is the following, where Participant 5 reports having a particularly fractious and unstable family home:

"My sister's been violent and abusive for like five years... it hurt my family – just it hurt my family a bit. It broke – it made my family weaker because obviously everyone was arguing all the time and my sister just didn't really want to be with us, it kind of was just a bit hard."

As a result of this, the young person no longer felt able to go to their mum for support.

"I used to speak to my mum a lot but I don't really speak to her anymore. Normally I just try and deal with it on my own, I don't really tend to speak to anyone about it."

Researcher: *"Is there a reason you don't go to your mum anymore?"*

"Because she has got so much stress, I feel mean putting more stress on her because I just know that one day she is going to crack. Because she's stressed out so I think that if I go to her, she's going to get more stressed out and then it will be obviously upsetting for me to see her get like that."

In this sense, limited family unity had reduced access to previously available emotional support, reducing the resources available to the young person to overcome adversity.

4.2.3 Non-parental support

Another consideration is whether, in the absence of parental support, the young person can access emotional resources through other family members. Four of the six young people who reported fractured relationships with their parents stated that they were able to, at least partially, compensate for this missing support through positive relationships with other family members. This confirms that for some young people non-parental family members play an important role in supporting them through adversity.

Participant 16:

"I got more attention from my sister caring for me than [my parents]."

Participant 5:

"I have improved with the little help from my Auntie and Uncle, who live in Liverpool. They would take over. They always spend time, when I'm even alone they just start talking to me, on the phone."

Participant 14:

"My Grandma ... [has] been there since birth because my Dad was not around ... My Mum is a rough subject because – I care for her, but she's not, like, special, special to me. She wasn't there for the whole mental ill stage and stuff like that."

4.2.4 Family as a risk factor

Under certain circumstances, a young person's family can also act as a risk factor or source of adversity. In the interviews, 11 of the 21 young people mentioned experiencing what could be considered difficult family circumstances. Moreover, when asked what challenges they had faced growing up, participants most frequently gave answers related to family (six of 13 young people). This suggests that family-related-adversity had been particularly impactful and relevant to our participant group:

Researcher: *"What challenges have you faced growing up?"*

Participant 3:

"I've kind of been facing some bullying from my sister sometimes, and it's not really enjoyable. ... It generally just makes me feel down because I feel like I'm not being, um how can I say it, I don't think I'm like being respected by her."

Participant 17:

"Moving house quite a lot, I moved house six times and my mum when I lived in [place name] had an abusive husband. Stuff like that."

Participant 19:

"So basically, when I was 11 years old my mum went to prison and I lived with me family, all for her own fault but she has been in and out of prison."

4.2.5 Impact of Targeted Youth Services on family support networks

Three of the young people who reported experiencing limited family unity described either an increase in family unity or gaining coping mechanisms to deal with their home situation through the targeted support received. Given the tentative positive relationship found between family unity and parental support available to the young person, by helping the young person experience greater family unity it is reasonable to conclude that targeted youth workers help strengthen the support networks surrounding the young person, which in turn increase resilience. Moreover, by providing a service that helps young people cope with family-based adversity, the TYS also acts as a support network itself through the provision of care and advice.

4.2.6 Friends as a protective factor

After family members, friends were the second-most frequently cited source of support in overcoming adversity; when asked "Who do you go to for support when you have a problem?", 10 of the 21 young people's answers included friends. Similar to family, we found that strong friendships allowed young people space to talk about their problems, whilst providing emotional and practical support against adversity.

Participant 13:

"I think [my friends] do support me quite a bit. If they notice you're a bit upset, they would tell you or be like you 'are you alright?'. You don't have to be worried about talking about things."

Participant 16:

"[my friends] try to be there for me as much as I am there for them. If either of us have problems we talk to each other, discuss it and try to give advice. (...) I will talk to them and they will try their hardest to make me feel better. And more times than not they do, it's like a mutual understanding."

Participant 3:

"Let's say someone's like bullying me. They'll do anything they can to help me out."

Participant 17:

"They try and do as much as they can with what I do in school, like one of them if they see me getting angry, they try and calm me down."

By providing support in difficult situations, friendships acted as significant source of support outside of the young person's immediate family circle. In this sense, friends acted as a protective factor that increased resilience.

4.2.7 Compensating for lack of parental support

Similar to non-parental family members, we found that some friendships provided a level of support that was not forthcoming from young people's parents. In this way, friendship compensated for a lack of parental support, helping the young person cope and display increased resilience. Nine of the 13 young people who said they would not use their parents as a source of support when faced with a problem, stated that they would either go to their friends instead, or described their friends as supportive.

Participant 16:

"Yeah [my parents] just weren't really there for me, so as I got older, I kind of realised it's not me, it's just them not caring and I kind of just have this point where I'm just like I don't really care, and they – they don't mean that much to me, I would definitely say in terms of my mum and dad I care a lot more about my friends than them and definitely more about my siblings."

Researcher: *"Yeah, so are your friends supportive of you?"*

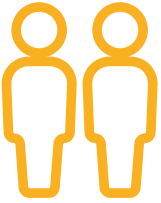
Participant 16:

"Yeah, definitely, they try to be there for me as much as they can."

Participant 14:

"[My mum] wasn't there for the whole mental ill stage and stuff like that. But friends are, yeah. Friends are very important cause they're not there every single day, but they're there when you need them."

Findings show that it is necessary to consider several relationships within a young person's close circle and the compensatory role they may play in the absence of each other. Whilst parental support can play a crucial role in a young person's response to adversity, it is not necessarily a deterministic factor in whether a young person is 'resilient'. A young person with emotionally or physically absent parents may still display a high degree of resilience against adversity, if (but not dependent on) other family members or close friends provide strong support in their place.



4.2.8 Making friends

Not all the participants stated that they used their friends as a resource against adversity. Four of the participants stated that they found it difficult to go to friends for support. For one of these participants (Participant 8) this was because they did not consider themselves to have any friends and found it difficult to make new ones. In the first interview, the young person described themselves as having to eat their lunch away from their peers due to ongoing friendship issues that meant they avoided big crowds. However, as noted above, by the second interview there had been significant changes in the young person's confidence. As a result of their one-to-one sessions with the TYS youth worker, the young person stated they felt able to begin eating their lunch with other people. By increasing their confidence, the young person was empowered to interact more with their peers, which could lead them to make more friendships in the future and in turn gain a larger support network.

Looking across all the interviews, five of the young people reported that targeted support helped them develop a variety of social skills and competencies related to building and maintaining relationships. Several of the young people reported that the youth worker helped increase their confidence in speaking with others, whilst some reported a positive change in attitude to how they interacted with their peers, including treating people more amicably and controlling their anger towards others.

Participant 12:

"I've learnt like how to control my anger a bit more and not like lash out at people."

Researcher: *"What's important to you in life?"*

Participant 13:

"It's like being happy, making other people happy and like laugh, like smile. Just like being nice, like being nice to people and then people are nice to you back."

Researcher: *"Has this changed since your first meeting?"*

Participant 13:

"Mmm, yes, I probably was like a bit miserable at the start like I don't know like I just thought it was probably just like – I used to be like, not like horrible but like, I don't know just like disrespectful."

These findings suggest that friendships form important support networks that help in a variety of ways, most notably as a key emotional resource which can help young people cope and process risk and adversity, in turn promoting resilience. Targeted support was shown to help young people improve their social skills and maintain relationships by helping them interact more positively with others and improve their confidence in speaking to their peers. By helping young people develop more positive friendships, youth workers can increase young people's access to resources during adversity.

4.2.9 Friendship and increased positive functioning

Our analysis illustrates that, along with supporting them through difficult situations, friendships can increase resilience in young people through increasing their 'positive functioning'. Nine of the 21 participants interviewed directly linked friendships to an improvement in at least one of our indicators for positive functioning: self-confidence, a sense of self, and general mental wellbeing. As noted in the conceptual framework, the individual skills, competencies and character traits required for dealing with everyday stresses act as our proxies for measuring an individual's positive functioning. Given our basic definition of resilience as 'normal to positive functioning in the face of stress or adversity' (see section 2.1), friendships that were positively linked to such indicators could be said to increase resilience in young people.

Three of the participants indicated that friendships strengthened their identity through providing a sense of purpose. Moreover, three of the participants indicated that friendships helped to create a more positive sense of identity and self-concept through increased self-confidence and self-appraisal. Six of the young people indicated that friendships positively affected their general mental wellbeing. For example, Participant 11 described the positive difference making a friend had on how they felt. Originally social anxiety had left them feeling isolated and unable to speak to anyone at school. However, after re-building a friendship with a neighbour, they reported a strong improvement in their mental wellbeing.

Much of the existing literature suggests that a well-established notion of one's own worth and efficacy acts as a key protective factor against adversity (see, for example, Rutter, 1987). By enhancing young people's sense of identity and mental wellbeing, friendships can enhance a young person's resilience. However, our analysis also suggests that through peer pressure, friendships can also act as a risk factor.

4.2.10 Peer pressure

Four of the young people stated that 'negative' peer pressure from friends had previously influenced their decisions. Ungar (2000: 1) argues "peer pressure to be a myth", stating instead that it should be understood as an active choice by young people to "enhance personal and social power". However, the instances of negative peer pressure mentioned within our interviews were all perceived as damaging by the young people themselves, who stated that peer pressure had led to them making choices they later regretted.

The detrimental impact of peer pressure is illustrated by a participant who had recently left a friendship group that they perceived to negatively influence their choices and actions. The young person explained how they could end up 'being with bad people doing bad things' in ways they otherwise would not, in order to meet the perceived social expectations set by the peer group.

Participant 13:

"They turn into absolutely horrible people, you look at them and they were the nicest kid a couple years ago and then they get in the wrong crowd to get popular, money, drugs, girls or whatever... I don't know how I got involved in the first place, I guess wanting to be popular."

As with all the other participants in the study who reported experiencing peer pressure, the young person stated that they regretted the decisions they made when influenced by their previous friendship group.

"I wasn't a very nice kid really. I didn't come to school much, always arguing with my mum, just out doing bad things making peoples day horrible and I regret it. If I could I would tell kids to stay away from people like that."

Moreover, despite the regret the young person felt towards their previous actions they believed that if their friends had not stolen their Mum's car, they would still be involved in that behaviour now.

Participant 13:

"If they didn't take my mum's car, I would have definitely continued to hang about with them... I was never in a stolen car or sold drugs or stuff like that. I would have if my mum's car wouldn't have been stolen... They're out doing horrible things and if they didn't take my mum's car then I know I would be a part of that. I'm glad I'm not part of that, I'm so glad I'm not part of that, everyday I'm so happy I'm not a part of that."

Contrary to Ungar's (2000) findings, this suggests, at least for this particular young person, a lack of agency in their decisions to stay within their friendship group and decisions made when within it. Although a source of adversity for the young person, the theft of their mum's car acted as a turning point in moving them away from their previous friendship group.

This example paints a complex picture of the effect of peer pressure on young people. As with the concept of resilience as a whole, the potential for friendships to negatively affect a young person through peer pressure should not be understood as either a wholly individual or externally driven outcome, but rather the result of the interaction between the individual and environment. One of the key takeaways from the analysis is that rather than being a 'myth', peer pressure

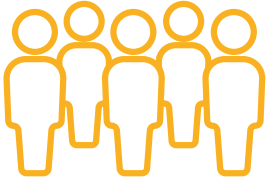
can have a negative effect on the problem-solving skills of young people and therefore can act as a risk factor to their resilience. Overall, both family and friends could help to protect young people against risk factors, by providing support and a space to talk through adverse situations. Some relationships were found to compensate for the absence of support in others, making it critical to consider several of the relationships within a young person's close circle when examining their resilience. Friendships were also found to increase resilience by promoting greater self-confidence, a sense of self, and general mental wellbeing. Nevertheless, both could act as risk factors, seen within examples of conflict or adversity at home, or through the peer pressure found within friendship groups.

Through their targeted support service, we found that youth workers could increase young people's resilience by helping to provide them with the skills required to navigate and access support within their close relationships, as well as form new ones. They also provided young people with coping mechanisms aimed at dealing with adverse home situations. Moreover, by offering an alternative and reliable source of comfort, emotional support and confidence, targeted youth workers should be recognised as providing an important support network outside of friendship and kin relations.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

4.3 Community



It is noted throughout the academic literature that a young person's community can be important for their resilience (Garmezy et al., 1984; Ungar et al., 2007; Werner, 1989). It was found in this study that communities can act as an extrinsic protective factor by helping young people build upon several of the internal characteristics associated with resilience (for example, a sense of belonging or a sense of purpose).

Many of the interview questions pertaining to 'community' were written with the intention of discovering more about the forms of community available to young people within their wider social environment. However, many of the participants saw themselves as part of close-knit friendship and family-based communities. This indicates that although 'community' was found to be a component of resilience, for many of the young people who took part in the study, communities tended to be closer to home.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

4.3.1 Sources of community

It was evident that the young people had varying interpretations of the concept of 'community'. The first question considered by participants on community defined community as 'a group of people who live in the same place or who have certain attitudes or interests in common' and asked the young people which community they felt most a part of. The most common answers related to friends (nine), online communities (eight) and school (five), with online communities and school communities overlapping with friendships. Ten of the 21 young people identified a community in which relations were made up of either friends or family, that is people that they knew well, frequently spoke to or spent time with.

This may suggest that wider forms of community were unavailable for many of the young peoples who took part in the study. However, it might also suggest that some of the participants' friendships provided particularly strong (and therefore more notable) communities.

In contrast, 11 of the young people indicated an understanding of community outside of the primary ties of friendship and kinship; where many of the members do not know each other personally but still feel connected by something shared by all members. Amongst others, interactions may be rooted in common location, identity or cause. The communities mentioned included, but were not limited to, place-based neighbourhood communities, the LGBTQ+ community, hobby-related communities, and activist communities.

Researcher: *Which community do you most feel a part of?*

Participant 11:

"[T]he climate change movement and fighting to do something."

Participant 15

"Like the musical community definitely because I do a lot of musical stuff in school so I feel like I am most part of that."

Having covered the role of family and friends in section 4.2, the analysis for this section will focus on communities based within the participants' wider social environments.

4.3.2 Sense of purpose

Many of the more distant forms of community identified in the interviews enhanced individual characteristics commonly associated in academic literature on resilience (see section 2). Several of these communities were found to help provide a sense of belonging and purpose through inhabiting meaningful roles within the community as well as enhancing a collective sense of self.

Two of the participants reported holding meaningful roles within their community, potentially increasing their positive functioning by enhancing their sense of purpose.

Participant 14:

"I do a lot of voluntary work. My mum runs a craft club so I like to go help out with the elderly."

Participant 15:

"I do quite a lot of the musical stuff for everyone because they are doing their musical GCSE soon so I'm always helping other people with that, even if it's just tuning guitar strings or something like that."

Four of the young people indicated they found a sense of collective purpose within their communities. For example, one participant stated that the community they felt most a part of was the climate change movement, through which they felt a part of something greater than themselves.

Participant 11:

"It's not good a thing that it's happening but it's good to fight for it and everyone is together and it's great. One of the first big ones I went to with my brother and that was great. Everyone is together for the same thing, probably the thing I've felt most part of."

A sense of purpose is recognised within the literature as one of the key internal protective factors for resilience that can also promote a strong sense of identity and help young people overcome adversity (Nygren et al., 2005; Ungar et al., 2007; Bronk et al., 2018). Our findings suggest that young people's resilience was enhanced by feeling connected to a community by providing individual purpose and/or a collective sense of identity.

4.3.3 Sense of belonging

A significant feature of the communities identified by the young people was the way that they provided a sense of belonging.

Participant 20:

"I feel quite proud of my community and I feel I am part of it because I do believe in the kind of things they believe in."

Participant 14:

"It's nice to say hi to someone when they walk past, it's that whole sense of feeling you're wanted, you are part of something. Not just kids and not just young adults but for everyone. Like the elderly people, it's nice to go wave at them as they are waiting for the bus. I think having a community can affect life quite a bit, it can make you feel a lot happier."

Closely related to a sense of collective purpose, a sense of belonging reflects the degree to which young people feel accepted within an environment and whether they share the views and beliefs of those around them. An enhanced sense of belonging has the potential to counteract adversity by improving young people's mental health (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993; Anderman, 2003; Nowicki, 2008) as well as increasing their confidence in the accessibility of resources to overcome difficulties (Goodenow, 1993).

Overall, it is apparent that there are a variety of sources of community identified by the young people involved in the research; from close-knit friendship and family-based communities to those within the wider social environment. Focusing on the latter, the analysis found 'community' to promote positive outcomes for some of the young people who faced adversity by enhancing their sense of purpose and belonging.

4.4 Local Area and Environment



A further factor to consider within young people's wider social context is the nature of their local area. Much of the literature argues that local environments have the potential to greatly influence the outcomes for young people facing adversity, as well as acting as a source of adversity themselves (Rutter, 1979; Ungar, 2005; Masten et al., 2009). It was found that the nature of a young person's local environment affected the resources available, how engaged the young person was with their local community, and their feelings of safety and/or exposure to risk.

It was found that participants were more than twice as likely to view their area in a negative light than a positive one. When asked "Could you tell me about where you live?", nine of the young people spoke negatively of their area, eight viewed their local area as a mix of positive and negative traits, and four viewed their area positively.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

4.4.1 Nothing to do

All nine of the young people who reported a negative perception of their area, linked this to a lack of things to do.

Participant 16:

"I live in [BSXX] postcode. It's far. Boring. Not much to do. Just hang around shops, so not much to do."

Participant 18:

"It's dead. I'm not there often. I'm only there when I'm at home."

Participant 7:

"There's like, my road's on a street of shops, like restaurants, but nothing really exciting. It's kind of boring."

The lack of local opportunities expressed by the participants could indicate a shortage of neighbourhood resources, such as youth clubs and community centres. Access to and involvement with pro-social organisations such as activity clubs and community centres have been indicated by several studies to promote resilience (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Ungar, 2005; Masten et al., 2009). Such neighbourhood resources create opportunities for young people to socialise locally, facilitating greater engagement with their local environments and the growth of support networks which can provide confidence, care and opportunities to socialise and build new skills.

The number of (and degree to which) participants felt negatively about their neighbourhood suggests that many of the young people were disengaged from their local environment and did not find a sense of purpose in their immediate surroundings. As we will expand on below, young people's engagement with their local area can affect resilience and the extent to which young people feel a sense of community towards their neighbourhood.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

4.4.2 Safety

Six of the nine young people who reported a negative perception of their neighbourhood cited safety concerns relating to crime and anti-social behaviour within their area. Neighbourhoods characterised by frequent crime and violence can increase young person's exposure to adversity and risk, risk which key theorists claim to be cumulative (Rutter, 1979; Garmezy, 1987; Masten et al., 2009) For many of the young people interviewed, this proximity to violence played heavily on their minds, deeply affecting their feelings of safety as well as perceptions of their neighbourhood.

Participant 20:

"[T]here was a murder, I think it was last year or the year before, [name withheld] and she was killed by her step-brother and it is right next door to me and you wouldn't think that but it happens in everyday life and you gotta try to deal with that. Like try and make sure nothing bad happens to you or friends or family."

Researcher: *"And that's something you think about a lot?"*

Participant 20:

"Yeah."

Participant 16:

"I'm in a really shit neighbourhood. Just to be blunt. It's not good. Going out in night-time usually ends up in people being stabbed, jumped etc etc. Any bad fucking thing."

Moreover, instances of neighbourhood violence and crime further reduced the young people's perception of the positive social activities available to them. Five of the young people stated that the lack of safety within their local area negatively impacted on their ability to access resources in their neighbourhood. This was either through avoiding certain areas due to safety concerns, or due to vandalism and destruction caused by the criminal activities of others.

Participant 12:

"There's like a cinema and a park but I like barely go over there. ... Going out involves going under loads of underpasses and its quite scary because loads of people hang around under there."

Participant 15:

"We go the leisure centre in [area] but I think that's about it because you can't go many places around here, because, like I said, those boys and stuff trash everything."

For two of the five young people, safety concerns not only had an impact on which areas of their local environment they were able to access but affected how much they went outside at all.

Participant 20:

"My nan won't let me out too late because she is worried in case of my safety and stuff."

Participant 16:

"I come from a bad area I guess you could say and you know there's you know stabbings – bad things happen there, so going outside generally doesn't really happen and it's not really a safe place to be in I guess especially at night."

Through reduced access to resources and increased fear of interacting with their environment, unsafe neighbourhoods decreased the young people's engagement with their local area. This is significant to our understanding of young people's resilience in Bristol, as neighbourhood engagement is repeatedly linked to enhanced resilience through a sense of local community and greater interaction with resources (Ungar et al., 2007, AYPH, 2016).

4.4.3 Local community

Neighbourhoods have the potential to provide a vital form of place-based community for young people. However, as discussed above, the majority of our participants appeared not to find a strong sense of community in the area they lived in. Only two of the 21 interview participants reported their local neighbourhood to be the community they most felt a part of. They were also the only two young people to state they felt involved in their local community. This could be driven by the safety concerns and disengagement with neighbourhoods outlined above.

This is illustrated by two of the young people who expressed both safety concerns and a detachment from their local neighbourhood. Both young people directly contrasted their feelings towards what they consider their community and the local community.

Researcher: *"Do you feel safe in your community?"*

Participant 15

"In [the musical community] yeah but not as in the community in general around here. ... Because in that musical community there's a lot of people that have been through the same thing and are going to music as a way of expressing themselves. Whereas in this community, there's a lot of bad people in this community in general. Especially, with the fighting between here and [area]."

Researcher: *"Which community do you most feel a part of?"*

Participant 12:

"Online - through social media. Like I talk a lot to people online who've similar interest to me and like, because people in my area aren't as understanding so I don't get along with the people in my area."

A lack of place-based communities provided by neighbourhoods was a contributing factor to an overall sense of a lack of community available to the young people interviewed. Given our findings above, increased safety and resources direct to local neighbourhoods for community regeneration could help increase young people's resilience in Bristol. Indeed, community regeneration was identified by one young person as source of pride and optimism

Participant 20:

"[Local area] has actually quite improved because they went through a big clean-up so everyone could sign up and clean up the area to try and make it more safe for everyone. More police have come on to the streets to stop knife crime. I am proud of how Bristol has come, compared to London it is way better."

Researcher: *"So do you feel part of that community?"*

Participant 20:

"I feel quite proud of my community and I feel I am part of that it because I do believe in the kind of things they believe in. I don't feel like there should be violence and I feel like things could be improved."

Overall, many of the young people's local environments lacked the opportunities and resources associated with building resilience; instead they often acted as a source of adversity and risk through exposure to frequent crime and violence. Partly as a result of this, young people were twice as likely to view their neighbourhood negatively than positively and often reported little sense of local community.

4.5 Education and feelings towards the future



Although there were relatively few questions asking about education directly, schools were frequently mentioned in the interviews, both in relation to the young people's current circumstances and in their feelings towards the future. In response to the question 'Is education or training important to you?', every young person answered that it was. The most common reason given for believing that education (or training) was important was because it was strongly associated with future success in their adult lives.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

Researcher: "Is training or education important to you?"

Participant 9:

"Of course it's important. It's important to everyone but just some people don't see that way. ... Because it's the only way you'll move on in life. Without it, you'll just end up getting stuck and you don't know how to get out."

Participant 2:

"Education is important to me because it will give me chance to succeed in life and have a very good job and like I won't have to deal with any financial issues in the future."

Participant 22:

"Because I know at school, I need to do well in some lessons to succeed."

Participant 12:

"You need a good education to get a decent job and without that you are not really going to go anywhere."

Getting a good education (and in particular gaining educational qualifications) was perceived to provide a clear pathway for future success. When asked about their main short-term goals and challenges in the future, 15 of the 21 young people mentioned something related to education, with three young people aiming to do well in their GCSEs and four saying they wanted to go to university. A traditional educational route appeared to be valued and seen as the most secure pathway to achieving a good future.

Almost all of the young people in the study who spoke about their goals for the future had similar aspirations: to get a good job that they enjoyed, to have somewhere to live, and to be financially stable. Although many had no idea what career they wanted to have, nine participants at some point mentioned a specific job that they wanted to have in the future. These ranged from becoming a lawyer, a special needs teacher, working in construction and joining the military. Whether or not they had a specific job in mind, everyone's goals appeared realistic and their concept of success was relatively reserved, focused around the idea of financial security and stability. Employment was valued by most as a means of providing future stability, which was considered to be the foundation of future success and happiness.

Participant 13:

"I want to make good money, go nice places, I don't want to be unhappy with my job or where I'm living whatever."

Participant 6:

"Because I don't want to be homeless, I want to have like a happy future that's all."

Participant 1:

"Having a job and a stable life."

However, despite valuing their education and wanting to do well at school, several of the young people faced barriers that prevented them from fully engaging with education. As noted earlier, the interviews revealed that many of the young people had faced considerable adversity, in particular struggling with mental health, which potentially contributed to some of the young people's disengagement in education.

For example, one participant said that they wanted to do better in school but struggled to motivate themselves to get up in the morning, meaning that they often ended up not even going.

Researcher: *“What do you want to get out of meeting your youth worker?”*

Participant 12:

“For me to actually get to school and actually do a full day for once. I haven’t done a full day since September.”

Three of the young people in this study were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), which is considered to be a significant risk factor. One participant had been out of school for three years due to mental health issues. This meant that, at age 17, they had no formal qualifications, causing them to feel “not that optimistic” about their future. Another participant left school due to their epilepsy and was receiving TYS in order to get help with their CV to apply for jobs. Although both of these young people reported targeted support having a positive effect on their mindset and confidence, the lack of stability and formal educational qualifications had evidently had a detrimental effect on their confidence in their future.

Even for the young people who were in full-time education, the future was still a significant source of worry. Only four participants felt positively about their future. Some lacked confidence in their own abilities, such as Participant 3 who said that they regularly changed their mind about what job they wanted to do, did not think that they were smart enough for university but did not think that they were ready for working either. This left the young person nervous about their future; in their final interview they said: *“I don’t really know if my future’s gonna be good”*.

Another young person expressed a fear of not achieving their goals.

Researcher: *“How do you feel about your future?”*

Participant 13:

“A bit worried. About getting good grades and I just wanna do well, really. I don’t want to mess up my life. People mess up their lives over tiny little things. Nowadays you can mess up your life so easily.”

[in a later interview] “I’m worried, just a bit worried, like I don’t want to be like a mess up. I don’t want to be one of those people like bum, I just like sit out on the streets or like – not even on the streets, just like somewhere I’m not happy. I want to just like do well, like have a future that I like choose, I want to be able to like make choices about what I do each day, not like have to like struggle to get by.”

This fear of failure and general worry about the future was common among the young people in the study, many of whom lacked confidence in themselves and their abilities. While education itself can help an individual to feel more secure in their future, other factors (particularly significant ones being negative self-belief and mental health difficulties) can cause education to become a source of worry, or prevent them from fully engaging with education in the first place. This demonstrates the importance of one-to-one youth services for addressing confidence and mental health in young people, in order to enable them to fully engage in their education, and thereby lowering the risk of them becoming NEET.

4.5.1 School as a protective factor

For a few of the young people, school acted as a potential risk factor. For example, three young people mentioned that they had had friendship difficulties at school, and two participants had moved schools due to bullying. Others were very critical of their school and did not get along with teachers. This led to them frequently getting into trouble, potentially putting them at risk of being permanently excluded or dropping out of school.

However, the interviews suggest that for the majority of the young people involved in the research, school acted as a protective factor. For example, many of the young people mentioned having good friends at school and five of the participants said that if they had a problem they would go to one of their teachers, demonstrating how school can provide an important support network and sense of community which assists in dealing with adversity.

School was also identified as an important source of routine and structure, both in the present and for the future. This point is best illustrated by the situation of one young person who dealt with a lot of adversity midway through the study. They had already moved school twice in the past (firstly due to severe bullying and then because their school was closed by Ofsted), and had settled at their new school where they said they felt loved and welcomed, and like they could learn for the first time in ages. However, this new school shut down abruptly, leaving the young person without a school to go to or any way to gain qualifications. They spoke in detail about the impact that the sudden lack of structure was having on them.

Interviewer: *“Do you find that education and training is important?”*

Participant 11:

“Oh yes, yes education’s really important, especially to keep a pattern for your day, keep a routine I mean. I think especially for me without a routine I think it’s just really unhealthy to be waking up whenever, even though it might seem really nice for a bit on holidays.”

Researcher: *“Do you feel like you have a purpose when you start your day?”*

Participant 11:

“I try to feel as though I have a purpose, but on days when – well, a lot of my days for this week have just been a bit – try to be filled with things, but then just turning quite empty. But, I’m not quite sure really – I don’t – there’s not much purpose, to be honest, no.”

Researcher: *“No. Did you feel that way when you were at school?”*

Participant 11:

“When I was in school, yeah, I was really motivated to try and learn... And, especially when you have, like, a pattern for each day – it’s got a – it must be really good for your mental health. Yeah, but once that goes, it’s quite difficult... Yeah I miss having a structure for each day at school, it’s, a lot of people wouldn’t really, don’t really appreciate it but even the little things like getting the bus to school and knowing what you’re gonna have each day for the lessons.”

As these quotes demonstrate, the routine and sense of purpose that school can provide may be extremely significant in protecting an individual’s mental health. This example of a young person who became (temporarily) NEET provides a brief insight into the effect it can have and demonstrates the importance of keeping young people in and engaged with education. To summarise, education was overwhelmingly seen as a positive and training was important to the young people. The majority of participants, despite worried about their futures, were aware that education could provide them with a sense of direction and the skills needed to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, poor mental health and low confidence prevented several young people from engaging in formal education.



5 Conclusion

The aim of the research was to explore the various subcomponents of youth resilience and identify links between these different factors rather than provide an exhaustive – or ‘complete’ – account that can be applied from one young person to another. The research has attempted to map out elements of resilience to demonstrate the varied factors that affect a young person’s ability to face adversity and learn from difficult experiences.

Youth resilience is a term that should be used with care. It is a complex social characteristic that is dependent on a multitude of factors associated with an individual, their relationships, social networks and various contextual realities. It is challenging, if not impossible, to make a single or overall judgement on what effects the resilience of a young person, not least as the balance between risk and protective factors is highly contextual; what can be a protective factor for one person can be a risk factor for another. Nevertheless, similar experiences were identified through this research, and these observations allow for some very broad brush insights to be drawn.

Findings demonstrate that resilience is not an inherent character trait; rather the product of the external support systems surrounding the individual and their interaction with them. These external systems, which occurred at varying levels of proximity to the individual, ranged from their close circle of family and friends to wider support networks in communities, local environments, and school. These often served as a protective factor, but also had the potential to be a risk factor for the young people.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

Encouragingly, we found that TYS not only acted as a key external resource against adversity, but enhanced young people's interaction with, and ability to navigate towards, various other resources within their environments. We therefore suggest that targeted support was critical for supporting many of the young people who took part in the study.

It was clear that the young people involved in TYS one-to-one services faced a myriad of challenges. The young people in the study had dealt with, or were dealing with at the time of research, extreme adversity including fractured familial relationships, poor mental health, and struggles with drug use. Such experiences had a notable impact on the young people's wellbeing and understandably stifled resilient behaviours at early stages of their intervention. The impact of targeted support on resilience was substantial, as illustrated by the young people's discussions of their increased wellbeing and new coping mechanisms gained from the one-to-one youth worker sessions. Nevertheless, a notable challenge was that, however much a young person gained from this support, several factors of youth resilience remain external to the individual, and these have an ongoing potential to significantly impact on the young people's lives.



Photo courtesy of Creative Youth Network

6 Bibliography

Anderman, L. H. (2003) Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle

school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 72, 5–22.

Association for Young People's Health., (2016) 'A public health approach to promoting young people's resilience'. London: AYPH

Bronk, K. C., Leontopoulou, S. and McConchie, J. (2018). Youth purpose during the Great Recession: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14.

Dumont, M., & Provost, M. A. (1999) Resilience in adolescents: Protective role of social support, coping strategies, self-esteem, and social activities on experience of stress and depression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28, 3, 343–363.

Garnezy, N. (1971) 'Vulnerability research and the issue of primary prevention', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 41, 1, 101–116.

Garnezy, N. (1987) Stress, Competence and Development: Continuities in the Study of Schizophrenic Adults, Children Vulnerable to Psychopathology, and the Search for Stress Resistant Children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 2, 159-174.

Garnezy, N., Masten, A., and Tellegen, A. (1984) 'The study of stress and competence in children: A building block for developmental psychopathology', *Child Development*, 55, 97–111.

Goodenow, C. (1993) The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30, 79-90.

Hart, A., Gagnon, E., Eryigit-Madzwamuse, S., Cameron, J., Aranda, K., Rathbone, A and Heaver, B. (2016) *Uniting Resilience Research and Practice with an Inequalities Approach*. SAGE Open.

Karahalios, A., Baglietto, L., Carlin, J., English, D. and Simpson, J. (2012) 'A review of the reporting and handling of missing data in cohort studies with repeated assessment of exposure measures', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 12, 96, 1–10.

Luthar, S. (1991) Vulnerability and resilience: A study of high-risk adolescents, *Child Development*, 62, 3, 600–616.

Luthar, S. and Zigler, E. (1991) 'Vulnerability and competence: A review of research on resilience in childhood', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 61 (6):6–22.

- Luthar, S., Sawyer, J., and Brown, P. (2006) 'Conceptual issues in studies of resilience: Past, present, and future research', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094, 10–115.
- Masten, A. S. (2001) Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56, 3, 227–238.
- Masten, A. S. (2011) 'Resilience in children threatened by extreme adversity: Frameworks for research, practice, and translational synergy', *Development and Psychopathology*, 23, 2, 493–506.
- Masten, A. S., Best, K. and Garmezy, N. (1990) 'Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity', *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425–444.
- Nowicki, A. (2008) Self-efficacy, sense of belonging and social support as predictors of resilience in adolescents, unpublished thesis, https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1155
- Nygren, B. L., Jonsén, A. E., Gustafson, T., Norberg, A. and Lundman, B. (2005) Resilience, sense of coherence, purpose in life and self-transcendence in relation to perceived physical and mental health among the oldest old. *Ageing Mental Health*, 9, 4, 354-362.
- Resnick, M.D., Harris, L. J. and Blum, R. W. (1993) The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 29, S3-S9.
- Rudzinski, K., McDonough, P., Gartner, R. and Strike, C. (2017) 'Is there room for resilience? A scoping review and critique of substance use literature and its utilization of the concept of resilience', *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy* 12, 1, 1-35.
- Rutter, M. (1979) 'Protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage', *Annals of the Academy of Medicine*, 8, 324-338.
- Rutter, M. (1987) 'Parental mental disorder as a psychiatric risk factor'. In: Hales, R.; Frances, A., (editors) *American Psychiatric Association annual review*, Washington D.C: American Psychiatric Press: 647–663.
- Rutter, M. (2013) 'Annual research review: Resilience – clinical implications', *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54, 4, 474–487.
- Ungar, M. (2000) The myth of peer pressure, *Adolescence*, 35, 137, 167–180.
- Ungar, M. (2004) A constructionist discourse on resilience: Multiple contexts, multiple realities among at-risk children and youth, *Youth and Society*, 35, 341–365.
- Ungar, M., (2005) *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to Resilience across cultures and contexts*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ungar, M. (2011) 'The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81, 1, 1–17.

Ungar, M. (2013) 'Resilience, trauma, context, and culture', *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 14, 255–266.

Ungar, M., Brown, M., Liebenberg, L., Othman, R., Kwong, W. M., Armstrong, M. and Gilgun, J. (2007) Unique pathways to resilience across cultures. *Adolescence*, 42, 166, 287–310.

Werner, E. and Smith, R. (1982) *Vulnerable but invincible: A study of resilient children*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Werner, E. (1989) 'High-risk children in young adulthood: A longitudinal study from birth to 32 years', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59, 1, 72–81.