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**Youth Development Circles:
A Report on a School Trial**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
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of
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Abstract

This research traces the development and trial of the Youth Development Circle (YDC) process in a low decile secondary school in a rural community in Aotearoa New Zealand. Youth Development Circles are an intervention based on restorative justice principles initially proposed by Braithwaite (2004). They were originally suggested as a strategy for use in an alternative education centre or “activity centre”. Increasing use of restorative approaches has enabled many schools to make significant progress in reducing suspensions, but there remains a concern for students whose behaviour is at the more serious end of the spectrum - who are at risk of suspension, or exclusion, after multiple stand-downs from school. The possibilities for the use of YDC were proposed to the school by the researcher, who is a Deputy Principal responsible for behaviour management and pastoral care. This proposal was supported fully by the school’s staff and Board of Trustees. The YDC process documented in this study was developed by the researcher, informed by a range of sources including Youth Development Circles, Judge McElrea’s proposed School Community Conference (1996), and Hui Whakatika, developed at the University of Waikato (2003). Participation in the circles was a condition for the student to remain at the school. The school is a state school, with a roll of approximately 800. The ethnic breakdown of the students is 56% Māori and 39% NZ European with 5% of Pasifika, Asian and other.

The YDC is a deliberate and careful process which aims to bring increased focus on the individual student and their educational outcomes, through engaging a community of care in supporting them. There were many anticipated benefits of the YDC for the student. Such benefits included an opportunity to establish and maintain healthy relationships of trust (within which negative experiences can be learned from), a re-establishment of trust, improved self-confidence and improved educational outcomes. The circles included members of the student’s whānau/family, a kaumātua/elder who cared about them, and representatives from local Police, Social Welfare, and the school. The circles were studied over a

period of one year. Circles met regularly throughout this time, at increasing intervals.

A mixed method case study approach was used for this research which includes the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The study evaluated the effectiveness of the YDCs by analysing student behaviour, attendance and achievement KAMAR data, minutes of each circle meeting, and interviews with circle participants.

Three student case studies are presented. The stories have had details altered and pseudonyms used to protect the persons involved. All the students completed the academic year without receiving a further stand down or suspension. The data showed an improvement in student attendance, achievement and engagement in all three case studies. Other outcomes include reflections on the process used, strategies for implementation in the school, and factors that either hindered or supported student, family or community involvement in YDCs.

This exploratory study suggests that the Youth Development Circle could offer a unique possibility for inter-sectorial collaboration in the field of restorative justice.

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Preface

“Every day the Youth Court deals with young offenders who are not part of the education system. While there are no accurate figures, anecdotally, it is thought that up to 80% of offenders in the Youth Court are not formally engaged with the education system” (Becroft, 2006, p. 4).

As a Deputy Principal with the school behavioural management portfolio, I am tasked daily with balancing the needs of the students, whānau, school and wider community, around pathways for students who continue to behave inappropriately. The statement above from Judge Becroft resonated with me, creating dissonance, challenging my current practice and the stand down and suspension culture within the school.

This study came out of an interest I have had after over twenty years of teaching Physical Education and Health and latterly three years as Deputy Principal, where I have listened to desperate teachers and family members who were unable to cope with the escalating behavioural issues occurring both in the classroom and at home. In both scenarios the easiest alternative is to throw them out; for teachers to throw them out of class and ultimately school, and for family members to throw them out of home. It is a difficult dilemma to manage and the frustration can lead to relationships that become irreparable.

It is getting increasingly difficult to keep students with behavioural issues in school so we are constantly looking for strategies and interventions to support this. While studying Restorative Practices in Education at the University of Waikato in 2013, I was searching for alternatives to the current practice that included stand downs, suspensions and exclusions when I read about John Braithwaite’s Youth Development Model, Fred McElrea’s School Community Conference Model and the University of Waikato’s Hui Whakatika Model. These three models will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. I thought this might be an opportunity to develop and trial a model which used a combination of the three models studied and evaluate the educational outcomes for the three students involved.

I hope this research might be of interest to senior leadership teams and BOTs at other schools that are looking for interventions to reduce the necessity to use stand down, suspension and exclusions.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The 1990's was a transformational period for Education in New Zealand; it was a time when neoliberal policies were introduced to promote marketization, managerialism and performance driven philosophy (Codd, 2010). These reforms encouraged schools to compete with one another. Principals had to make decisions about how to deal with inappropriate student behaviour due to the added pressure of community perception and competition. Principals did not want to keep a student who made their school look 'bad', so suspension was a serious temptation.

Due to a steady increase in the number of suspensions of students from state and state-integrated schools during the 1990s, there was increasing community, political, and educational concern about the number of students missing out on their education through being suspended or expelled. This led to an inquiry being carried out into children at risk, as a result of truancy and behavioural problems, by the Education and Science Select Committee in 1995. In the report the Select Committee expressed concern at the increase in both formal and informal suspensions of students from school (MOE, 1999).

In July 1999 The Education (Suspension) Rules 1999 came into force to ensure that individual cases were dealt with in a fair and reasonable manner. A new category called 'stand down' was introduced which replaced the previous 'specified suspension' option. At the same time a new stand down and suspension data base was introduced to collect information on stand downs and suspensions according to the new legislation. In consultation with schools and communities the Ministry of Education undertook a few initiatives which included the Strengthening Families initiative, increasing the number of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, providing funding for Alternative Education Programmes for students under 16 years of age, providing MOE Special Education Facilitators and the development of Homework Centres to name a few (MOE, 2000).

Concurrently the Youth Court Judge at the time, Judge McElrea (1993, 1996) raised his concerns about the numbers of suspensions and exclusions occurring within schools.

Between 1999 and 2000 a Waikato University team piloted restorative conferencing, with Ministry of Education (MOE) funding, as an attempt to reverse the trend of suspensions that was occurring. Training was offered to 34 more schools a year later. The MOE saw the potential in this initiative and paid a training provider to work with many more schools (Education Gazette, 2011). The overall project intention was to reduce suspensions, and while that is continuing in schools today, every secondary school principal will be familiar with the question of what to do when faced with serious behaviour incidents. The ethical and moral dilemma becomes apparent, as you know that this young person really needs to be at school, but you know also that you should not have them at school for safety reasons. The possibility of reducing suspension rates to zero in schools looks to be impossible from this perspective. However the current study was set up to test whether Youth Development Circles could provide an alternative avenue for schools to look at to further reduce suspension and exclusion rates.

Traditionally in a school the student/teacher relationship has been one based on control. The BOT, principals, leadership teams and teachers make the rules of the school to ensure the physical and emotional safety of the school community and these rules are then enforced. Where students engage in behaviours towards the serious end of the spectrum, and the safety of the school community is at risk, the school administration react by punishing the offender: exclusion from school being one option. Research into school exclusion suggests that if students are disengaged from school there is a strong likelihood of their going down what has been referred to by researchers as the 'school to prison pipeline' (Varnham, 2005; Wilson, 2014).

There are many commonalities of purpose between the Justice System, Child Youth and Family and schools. All sectors are currently looking for more inclusive and less adversarial ways to deal with young people who

continue to behave badly. It is time we had a change within the education system to support a collaborative approach to keeping our young people in schools. In practical terms this could mean a pending suspension for a student at school triggers an alert to Police, Child Youth and Family and any other identified agency relevant to supporting the student's needs, to come together with the school to support the young person and their family.

Background

Judge A. J. Becroft (2006), Principal Judge in the Youth Court, reported that "Every day the Youth Court deals with young offenders who are not part of the education system. While there are no accurate figures, anecdotally it is thought that up to 80% of offenders in the Youth Court are not formally engaged with the education system" (p. 4). Becroft defines "not formally engaged", as being either excluded, a truant, not enrolled in a school or waiting for a place in Alternative Education, placement or employment.

According to Judge Becroft, involvement in education is one of the four most important protective factors against future criminal offending. Developing resilience by helping young people feel part of society through involvement in school helps them stay out of trouble, so it is critical that young people stay in school as long as possible. Even if a student is not achieving well academically, if they are attending school regularly, they are much less likely to become involved in criminal behaviour, so alternatives to stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions need to be found (Becroft, 2006). While most schools have a "success for all" underlying philosophy visible within their School Charter, sometimes keeping these students at school becomes untenable without significant extra resourcing to support both the classroom teacher and the senior leadership team. Keeping these difficult students can come at a cost to the school and these costs include teacher mental and emotional wellbeing, other students right to an equitable share of undisturbed learning time and from a wider perspective, the reputation of the school.

During the 1990s, Judge F.W.M. McElrea, a Judge of the Youth Court and District Court of New Zealand, who had a special interest in Youth Court, also drew attention to the connection between criminal justice and school justice. While he was working with a Youth Advocate in South Auckland, the correlation between the attendance at Youth Court and non-attendance at a school was brought to his attention. Other writers too have noted this link. As noted by McElrea in a 1997 paper, an American writer recently summed up the connection between education and crime this way:

“Truancy may be the beginning of a lifetime of problems for students who routinely skip school. Because these students fall behind in their schoolwork, many drop out of school. Dropping out is easier than catching up. ...Truant students are at a higher risk of being drawn into behaviour involving drugs, alcohol or violence” (Garry, 1996, p.1).

McElrea (1996) described these youth as young people with minimal education, poor family support, usually no job or welfare to provide a legitimate source of spending money and thus no real opportunity for socialisation. He believed that there were no formal processes in place at the schools to follow before suspending a student, other than the Principal making a judgement about the student's 'misconduct' and the safety of the other students at the school. The only procedural checks seemed to occur after the suspension and involved notifying and meeting with the parent, notifying the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Board of Trustees (BOT) and a referral to a counsellor. This lack of accountability concerned McElrea and he saw parallels with the Youth Court; both systems being of a punitive nature where the basic outcomes in adult court were mirrored by the discipline handed out by schools in the form of suspensions and exclusions. As McElrea (1996) observed, these parallels included aspects such as:

- People in positions of authority were in control (Lawyers, judges and teachers).

- In court the proceedings is controlled by judges, prosecution and defence counsel and in a school it is controlled by the Principal, BOT and MOE.
- Both the offender and the community s/he is involved in have very little say in the outcome.
- A focus is on the rights of the individual rather than balancing consideration of the rights and responsibilities of the whole communities.
- The focus on rules minimises the opportunities for learning and a change in behaviour through the working through feelings of shame and remorse.
- Punishment in court and discipline in a school is seen as fair if there were clear rules broken.
- The process being non participatory and not inclusive.
- It is inquisitorial and retributive.
- Little effort is made to address the causes of offending and to reduce the opportunity of reoffending. There is no consideration of contributory factors, including social learning and capacity.
- Both systems do not provide opportunities for making things right or for any form of social learning. An attitude of removing the perpetrator from the community (by imprisonment or expulsion) predominated.

According to McElrea (1996) the community has a right to know if a student is at school being educated and developed into a responsible citizen and if they were not at school then the community should be invited to be part of the solution. He also suggested that both the community and the school have been guilty of the 'out of sight out of mind' attitude. Believing that if the problem is removed by either imprisonment in the community or exclusion/suspension from school, the problem will go away, but in fact the problem has just been relocated and becomes someone else's problem to deal with. Judge McElrea (1996) was a strong proponent of the restorative justice model for school discipline and this is summed up below:

“If we are not prepared to act inclusively, to accentuate the positive to build on the resources of the community in order to support embattled schools and families, to devise remedial plans and give them a chance to work then either the problem is simply going to be passed on to the next school, or there is no next school. Then what has been the school’s problem now becomes the business of the courts, and the police, and the prisons and the next generation of victims.” (McElrea, 1996, p. 94)

Restorative practices in the NZ Education context

Conferencing was initially introduced into NZ schools to reduce suspensions, which had been increasing rapidly during the 1990’s. This strategy was partially successful with suspensions and exclusions reducing, however the number of stand downs was still high with an over representation of Māori and Pasifika students. During this time those staff who managed the discipline systems in schools were looking to restorative practice (RP) for new ideas and initiatives to deal with the increasing number and types of issues that schools and families had to deal with (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010).

Restorative conferencing was not an opportunity for the school authorities or wider community to speak and judge. It offered a pathway to restore a relationship that had been harmed by the behaviour (Restorative Practices Development Team Resource, 2004). The conference provides an opportunity for the young person, their families, the school, members of the community and the harmed student to work through the process together when dealing with behaviours that have caused harm. They all meet together to decide what should happen next, rather than have a decision imposed on them from the school, such as a stand down or suspension. According to Drewery (2004) “Victims of crimes can benefit from the opportunity to confront the perpetrators of their victimization, and in so doing restore themselves to greater strength and offer an opportunity of redress to the offender” (pp. 336-337). The Restorative Conference was an attractive option for schools that were looking for alternative options to continual punishment and eventually suspension or exclusion (Drewery, 2004).

In 1998 the Ministry of Education contracted a group from the University of Waikato to develop and trial a conferencing process in schools. An excellent Restorative Resource was produced for schools that were looking to do something different to stand downs and suspensions. This resource presented a range of restorative practices including restoring strained classroom relationships, restorative interviewing and formal restorative conferencing called Hui Whakatika, meaning making amends, a name given by Angus Macfarlane. The Hui Whakatika was a culturally appropriate process developed to be used with Māori (Berryman & Macfarlane, 2011). The Ministry criteria for selection of the schools to be involved in the project included low decile, high proportion of Māori and Pacific Island students and a relatively high suspension rate within the Waikato region. In the conferencing model that was developed at the University of Waikato, ways of speaking was an important focus. Care was taken to always speak respectfully and although it sounds simple this was a skill that needed to be developed by the facilitator, it did not necessarily come naturally (Drewery, 2004).

The Development Team at the University of Waikato proposed a form of conversation using among others principles based on narrative therapy (White, 2007). Drewery (2014) called it “a process that aimed to reposition both parties in the story of what happened, and deliberately produces both new identities and new relationships” (p.5). Narrative therapy is a process that seeks to take a respectful, non-blaming approach to the meeting, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to the influence of problems in their lives (Dulwich Centre, n.d., para 1).

An independent evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry which demonstrated significant satisfaction with the process amongst participants. In spite of this apparent success, in retrospect it was naïve to think that the introduction of restorative conferencing on its own could reduce stand downs and suspensions in schools. As the behaviour of students at some schools continues to occur at a more serious level, we

need to look further for interventions that allow schools to manage these behaviours at school by engaging the support of the wider community. According to the MOE (2014), in 2013, physical assault on other students was the main reason for stand-downs, accounting for 26.0% and drugs (including substance abuse) were the main reason for suspensions accounting for 25.7%.

The Range of Restorative Practice in school

The principles of Restorative Practice in schools are strongly linked with restorative justice (RJ), the underlying philosophy of which is respect (Zehr, 1990). This means respect is given to all parties including the victim, the offender and all their community of care. The care of all participants, as well as the importance of restoring relationships, is fundamental to the practices used in both justice and education. “RP is not about making people behave so that they fit in to some predetermined whole, but about maintaining a quality of relationships where inclusion, curious inquiry and equity are primary goals” (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p.111). RP in schools can take many forms and can be used in a variety of ways to achieve specific outcomes. These can range from full restorative conferencing through to mini chats, mediated restorative conversations, restorative circles, classroom conferences and casual conversations (Jansen & Matla, 2011).

The use of restorative practices in a school can have a deep effect on the whole school culture (Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005), and Drewery (2014) reports that “in New Zealand, schools that embrace a whole – school approach have been found to do better on all measures, including suspensions and exclusions, as well as achievement statistics, than schools that used the practices for disciplinary and behaviour management purposes only” (p. 2).

The use of restorative practices within education has been widely accepted in New Zealand, so much so that the Ministry of Education (MOE) have produced a Restorative Practice Kete (MOE, 2014), and a comprehensive professional learning programme will be implemented in the near future. The whole school implementation of restorative practices

has had positive results for improving student/teacher, teacher/teacher, teacher/ whānau and leadership/community relationships and in deescalating conflicts within the school environment. RP has also been identified as a contributing factor in reducing suspension rates in New Zealand secondary schools (MOE, 2014) and in 2013 stand down, suspension and exclusion rates were at their lowest in 14 years of recorded data (MOE, 2014). There is a concern however, that schools continue to stand-down, suspend, and exclude more Māori students than any other ethnic group (MOE, 2014).

When a student is excluded from school, for the community to deal with, the opportunities for the student are reduced, there is more chance of serious offending and there is an increased chance of Youth Court attendance. Once a student reaches Youth Court, there is an increased number of people involved, it is prescriptive and there is zero community involvement. If the young person gets into crime there are massive costs in law enforcement, courts, social welfare homes, prisons, property damage, hospitalisation of victims, and so on. McElrea, (1997) emphasises that as well as all the financial costs associated with the crime there are also the heavy personal and social costs for the victims, offenders and their families and the community in which they live.

Cameron and Thorsborne (1999) purport that “policy and practice which seek to exclude these very students who are in the greatest need of social support and education could be considered to be counterproductive at the very least” (p.12). According to Morrison (2007) “suspension puts students at greater risk of entering the formal criminal justice system” (p. 60) and suspension disconnects those who are already feeling alienated from the school community and their peers and can increase the risk of self-harm and harming others. Morrison (2007) goes on further to say that if there is no school-wide system of support the consequence is that problem behaviour is punished by way of suspension which can lead to an increase in aggression, truancy and risky behaviour.

Education is seen as the primary solution to breaking this cycle. According to Becroft, (2009)

“School is important, not only in equipping a young person with the academic skills to achieve success and happiness but it also teaches pro-social attitudes and skills, helps develop friendships and helps students form a sense of belonging. All these things contribute to the development of self-esteem” (<http://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/youth/publications-and-media/speeches/what-causes-youth-crime-and-what-can-we-do-about-it>).

An increase in self-esteem has a strong correlation with improvement in academic performance which in turn fosters a further increase in self-esteem (Hayes & Fors, 1990). Further, research shows that a person with a higher self-esteem displays less defensive and deviant behaviour (Gurney, 1987). This is very relevant in a low socio-economic community, such as the one in which the research was conducted, as the moment a student is excluded from school, apart from there being very few options available to them, they lose a sense of belonging, feel marginalised and alienated, and although it is not easy to engage with students whose behaviour in schools is experienced as difficult, even these students have the same basic need to belong and feel included as the rest of the student body (Wearmouth et al, 2007). The anecdotal evidence is that these students often disengage totally from any form of alternative education, wandering the streets day and night, losing all purpose, hope and any self-esteem they ever had. If principals and BOT's are serious about reducing suspension and exclusion numbers, it is necessary to be looking beyond what is currently being done, for inter-agency collaborative interventions that will support students and their whānau. According to Bruner (1996) young people's behaviour is influenced by the social contexts in which they live. The young person's family and culture have a significant part in shaping the behaviour of that young person at school (Wearmouth et al. 2007). Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) believe that “restorative justice provides an opportunity for schools to practice participatory, deliberative democracy in their attempts to problem solve around those serious incidents of misconduct that they find so challenging” (p. 7). Wearmouth et al (2007) report that “in some parts of the world, there is an increasing interest in exploring how to support students whose behaviour is

considered unacceptable at school by establishing partnerships with students' home communities so that those community norms and values might help to encourage more appropriate student behaviour" (p. 196). Wearmouth et al (2007) suggest that these partnerships along with community groups can be important sources of support for schools when developing initiatives and interventions to address the students with difficult behaviours. However they also stress the importance for educators to acknowledge and respect cultural differences and values and to seek advice from the community when developing initiatives to respond to these behaviours.

When schools begin searching for support and advice from the wider community it is important to gain an understanding of what is happening within the region and what interventions are currently operating, to reduce the duplication of resources. A recent Salvation Army report (Johnson, 2015) claims that there is a distinctive pattern of good or bad fortunes emerging for New Zealand's children and youth which appears to be based on where they live. Regions such as Otago, Canterbury and Wellington have high rates of participation in early childhood education and low rates of reported harm or neglect to children. These indicators have led to greater levels of educational success, lower youth unemployment and less youth offending. In areas such as Northland, Gisborne, Waikato and Manawatu-Wanganui, by contrast, the outcomes are opposite, with higher levels of youth unemployment, higher rates of reported harm against children, lower levels of educational success, and higher levels of youth offending. The description of the region leads one to believe that the issues occurring within the schools are not in isolation. The serious nature of the macro social issues described within the Salvation Army Report suggest that multiple government agencies are likely to already be engaged in interventions, and communication between the school and these agencies might be able to reduce the practice of these different agencies operating in silos.

Difficult socio-economic conditions will inevitably be reflected in the behaviour of some students in local schools. In the region where this study took place, there were 34.9 stand downs per 1000 students in 2009

compared with the total in NZ of 27.6 per 1000 students. By 2013 the NZ the local region stand down rate had reduced to 21.7 per 1000 students which was consistent with the reducing rates at the school in which the current research was conducted. However, the Education Review Office (ERO) Report on the wellbeing indicators for student success suggested that a portion of this reduction could be due to the 'creative' use of Section 27 of the Education Act by Principals, as an alternative to stand down, to reduce their stand down numbers (ERO, 2015). Section 27 states that a Principal may exempt a student from attendance for a period of no more than 5 days (NZ Government, 2015). The stand down rate for Māori students within the region was at 27 per 1000 students compared with New Zealand European at 10.8 per 1000 students (MOE, 2013). The following statistics, supplied by the Ministry of Social Development, show a deeper layer of the issues that the community is facing and which appears to be reflected within the school gates. In the region where the current research was conducted, negative social statistics abound, according to the Ministry of Social Development (2013):

- Crime – Youth under 17 years apprehended by Police are 73% more likely to be prosecuted than the national average.
- Truancy – In 2012, the number of students who were frequent truants was 110% higher than the national average.
- Family violence – 200% higher than the national average for reports to Police of family violence
- No qualifications – 60% more youth leave school without any qualifications compared to their New Zealand peers
- Teenage pregnancy – 100% higher proportion of teen mothers than the national average.
- Sexual health – 81% more than the national average for chlamydia infections (highest in New Zealand and the OECD)
- Smoking – 50% more youth aged 15–19 smoke cigarettes.
- Poverty – 46% of families live in the lowest socio-economic neighbourhoods (deprivation level deciles 9 and 10)
- Single parents – 27% of all families are single parent families.

It is arguable that the level of stand down, suspension and exclusion within the schools in the region, due to poor behaviour, is a reflection of the combination of problems, detailed above, that the region as a whole is experiencing. As such, the difficulties facing schools in the region need to be treated as a community problem where the community works together to find the solutions. As there will probably be multiple agency involvement already supporting some of these students in the community, it makes sense to look at an inter-sectorial collaborative approach that could be triggered by a pending suspension from school and be facilitated by the school.

In 2010 the stand down rates at the school involved in the study reached 41 and 131 in school ‘time-outs’ (an in school version of stand down). The levels of poor, and at times dangerous, behaviour were at a point that the school leadership and BOT had to acknowledge that the current discipline plan was not meeting the needs of the students, teachers, families or wider community. Under the existing regime, a stand down was given to a student if a serious behaviour was displayed. The nature of the behaviour committed was generally one judged to be of a criminal nature, such as physical assault, the use or possession of drugs, arson or theft. The length of the stand down ranged between one to five days, according to the seriousness of the behaviour. A student who received a stand down was collected immediately by a member of the family and was not permitted on the school grounds for the duration of the stand down. On the student’s return to school, a meeting was held with the Deputy Principal (DP) and a member of the student’s family in the DP’s office. Generally the student would apologise to the DP and parent present and make a commitment through a contract of some description not to repeat the behaviours exhibited. The person harmed was never involved in the meeting and no actions were ever taken to repair any harm done.

The student would return to class having missed between one and five days’ learning and be expected to just fit back in, even if it was in a class with the victim. There was no acknowledgement or thought at all to how the person harmed might be feeling, whether it was a teacher or a fellow student. It is not surprising then that the number of students who

reoffended was high. It was a flawed process. Every time the student reoffended s/he would repeat the cycle until the maximum stand down days was met and then s/he would either leave school, if they were sixteen, or be moved on to alternative education. The discipline system was totally punitive, there were large numbers of students on detention daily, teachers' only strategy was to throw students out of class and senior leadership's strategy was to pass them on to Alternative Education options. Students who received two stand downs would be transitioned to an Activity Centre, a small satellite school for students with learning and behaviour issues. The successful reintegration of these students back into mainstream education has been minimal over the last 10 years and most students have transitioned from the Activity Centre into Alternative Education or into the wider community, they have not successfully returned to mainstream education. There have however been two students who have successfully transitioned back into the school and completed Year 13. It should be noted that within the time of this research a new manager has been appointed at the Activity Centre.

There became an urgent need to reassess the discipline process which led to the Deputy Principal (DP) in charge of behaviour management to investigate and begin a five year journey to implement the use of a wide range of restorative practices (RP). These practices ranged from proactive circle work within a classroom environment through to full community restorative conferences for specific categories of behaviour, such as verbal assault on a staff member, physical assault, theft and drugs. A full restorative conference was held on the return to school of any student who had been stood down for a serious incident. The meeting was facilitated by the DP and held in a large meeting room in a circle. The person harmed, who was either another student or teacher, was invited to attend, along with members of their family or support person. The perpetrator, and their support person, was present along with representatives from the school, the Principal or another DP, the school guidance counsellor, and members of the community such as police were invited for behaviours consistent with breaking the law.

The restorative practice work in general, has ameliorated staff/student, student/student, school/whānau and staff/staff relationships. Over the last five years the proactive circle work that has occurred at the beginning of the year within Form Classes has provided a platform from which student/student conflicts are less evident and breakdown in relationships easier to restore. The explicit teaching of relationship building, values and communication skills has been part of the Year 9 induction programme and involves the first two days at school spent in form class working through a variety of circle based activities. The subject teachers of most classes are investing in the time to develop strong working relationships with their students based on mutual respect, before they begin to teach any subject specific content. The school has had a strong focus on improving community engagement and whānau are encouraged to come into the school at any time. This has seen families that have previously had poor experiences within education, confidently attending school functions including whānau evening, report evening and prize giving. There have been reduced incident referrals from classroom teachers to Heads of Faculties and reduced referrals to Senior Leadership as the teachers are developing strategies to manage the behaviours themselves, reducing the numbers of students removed from class. Stand-down and repeat offences rates also reduced a little over this time as evidenced in the graph below.

In School Time out, Stand down and repeat offences

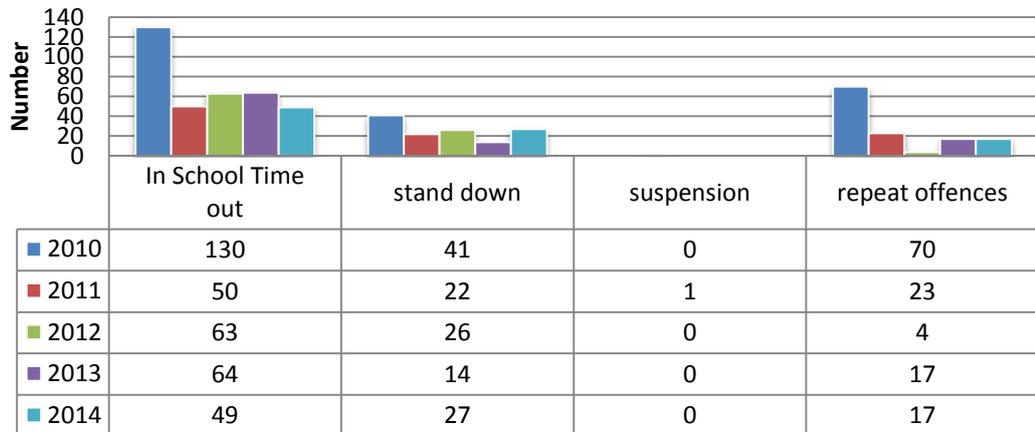


Table 1

Nevertheless, stand-down data still showed a substantial number of students who continued to make bad choices, behaved in an unacceptable way or took part in alleged crime within the school environment. The increasingly serious nature of the behaviour was of significant concern. There were many more incidents of a violent nature, particularly assault on other students. The graph below shows the number of Restorative Practice Conferences (RPC's) held in 2013 and the nature of the offence.

Restorative Conferences held in 2013

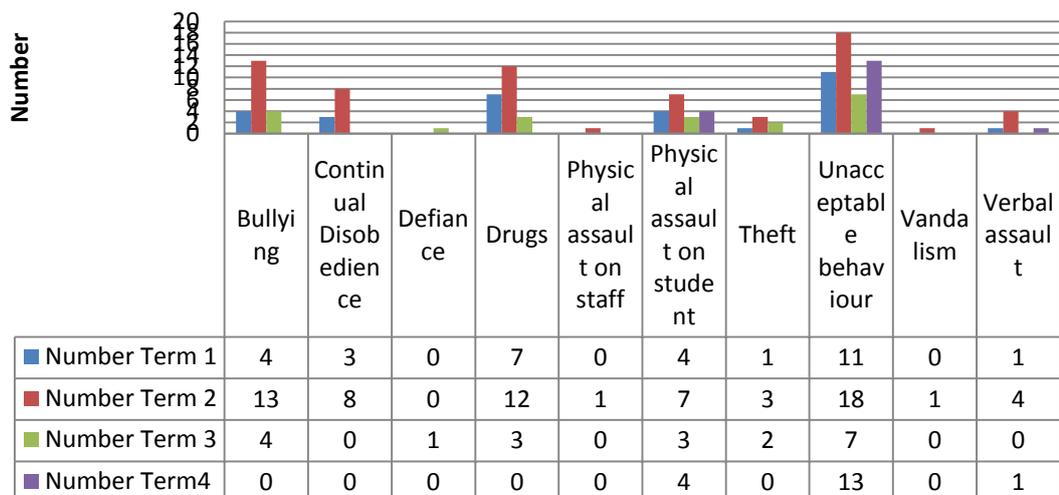


Table 2

Māori students were significantly over represented in the statistics.

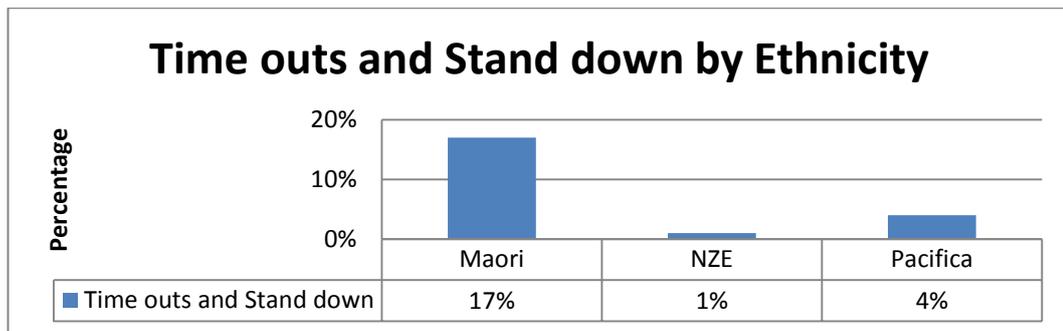


Table 3

It was clear by the end of 2013 that the introduction of school wide RP including RPC's was not enough to keep students exhibiting behaviours including theft, assault and use and supply of drugs at school, and a further intervention was required.

The Family Group Conference

Restorative justice is largely used with the domain of the criminal justice system and an example of an intervention used for incidents of youth offending and proposed by youth court judges included the Family Group Conference (FGC) (Varnham, 2005). A system of juvenile justice was introduced in New Zealand in 1989 (Ferguson & Becroft, nd). The FGC was one method which has been used successfully to divert the number of young people from the courts. This model uses a culturally appropriate process, includes the participants in decisions about how best to deal with the offending and holds offenders accountable. The FGC is used to avoid prosecuting the young person and also as a way to determine how to deal with the young person. Both FGC's and Restorative Justice provide an opportunity for victims, offenders and their communities to have a say in how the offence should be resolved. The FGC enables all parties to be involved in the decision-making and to use a process appropriate to their culture. The young person must agree with the summary of facts presented by the police and accept responsibility for their actions before an FGC can be held. If the young person does not agree with the summary of facts the FGC does not continue and the case is referred back to the court (Morris & Maxwell, 2006).

The FGC process includes the young person, his or her advocate, whānau member(s), the victim and whānau or the victim representative, the police, the youth justice coordinator and a CYFS social worker (if the young person has one designated) (McElrea, 1996). The FGC has the responsibility of formulating a plan or making recommendations. Morris and Maxwell (2006) give examples such as: “Apologies, reparation, working for the victim or community, donations to charity, restrictions on liberties and involvement in programmes such as counselling or training” (pp. 248-249).

The plans and decisions made by the group are binding and are supervised by the persons nominated in the plan, with the Court usually being asked to adjourn proceedings for a limited time period of a few months to allow the plan to be implemented (McElrea, 1996). The group can be called together at a later date to review the plan particularly if the young person fails to complete set tasks. A new plan can be formulated and this can always include a recommendation for prosecution in court.

“The success of the procedures, in ensuring that young people take responsibility for offending by repairing harm, and diverting young people from courts and custody are undeniable” (Morris & Maxwell, 2006, p.255).

It was found however that the social and emotional needs of many young people within the system remained unmet, particularly in relation to mental health, drugs and alcohol, anger management, improving interpersonal relationships and most importantly improving educational outcomes (Morris & Maxwell, 2006).

Ferguson & Becroft (nd) acknowledge that while there are flaws with the FGC system, it does provide a more participatory process for everyone who is directly affected by the offending.

As mentioned earlier, in the mid 90’s Judge McElrea (1996) proposed a similar concept to the FGC as an intervention to be used within schools which took a restorative approach as well as involving the community within the process. McElrea (1996) called it the School Community

Conference (SCC) and suggested some possible examples of what the intervention would look like:

- Be held before any suspension of over three days could be given.
- Include the student, staff representative, the principal, a BOT member, members of the student's family, Youth Court advocate, member of the police and one or more members of the community (Kaumātua, sports coach, cultural leader, counsellor or any person that the student might have a positive relationship with).
- Include Youth workers.
- Any relevant matters raised by the student with regards to the removal from school could be discussed including the cause of the behaviours and how to begin to fix it. A collaborative action plan could be developed which would involve something for the school's benefit, something for the student's benefit, something for the family's benefit and something for the community's benefit.
- Be reviewed after two or three months by a reconvened SCC which could make a report for the BOT (this could include expulsion).
- Be used as an intervention by the principal at any time before behaviours reached a crisis point of suspension or expulsion in order to deal with serious behavioural issues (McElrea, 1996).

A most important aspect of the proposal was to encourage people to take ownership of the problem. For this to occur people have to be consulted and be involved in the decision making process. Just like at an FGC the SCC plan is co-constructed by all parties in attendance, that gives everyone ownership of it (McElrea, 1996).

The SCC proposal by Judge McElrea (1996) was a creative and forward thinking intervention which clearly showed the link between justice and education, and that what was implemented within the Youth Court, in particular the FGC, could be modified and applied in a school setting with similar success. It was a model proposed in 1996 and was never actioned by schools, which is a pity as this proposal funded properly in conjunction

with a better truancy service could have helped marginalised people in our community.

I am currently a Deputy Principal with a portfolio that includes behaviour management, and a significant amount of my time is spent working at the sharp end of the behaviour spectrum. At times the role of a Deputy Principal, with this particular portfolio, can be lonely and stressful. When dealing with students who display difficult or dangerous behaviours there are multiple aspects to consider; the safety of that particular student, the student (s) that has been harmed, oneself, the general school population, the staff and the whānau. Many ethical and moral decisions need to be made and sometimes quickly with little or no support. If the alleged behaviour is of a criminal nature this complicates things further. Calling family members to notify them of the behaviours that have occurred at school can be very distressing, particularly when families are also at their wits end, do not know where to turn and a three or four day stand down is not something they can easily deal with. Family reactions can include anger and abuse towards the DP, tears of embarrassment and frustration or simply dismissal and refusing to accept or acknowledge what has happened. A further complication in the decision making process is the comments from some staff. Angry staff members who have been harmed would like to see the student, who has behaved badly, removed from the school permanently. However, this is a complex issue which involves so many social justice dimensions and it cannot be dealt with quickly. A decision is a very considered process.

The Ministry of Education guidelines state that suspending a student should be a last resort. It is a decision which can have far reaching consequences for both the student and their family and should only be made after considering all the implications for their educational future and life chances (Ministry of Education, 2009). This must always be at the back of the mind when dealing with students exhibiting difficult or challenging behaviours.

It is getting increasingly more difficult to keep students with behavioural issues in school so we are constantly looking for strategies and

interventions to support the ability to do this. The wider social issues of the community are being brought in to the school on a daily basis and whilst we continue to employ more and more staff, such as truancy officers and social workers, to support students, teachers and whānau it still is not enough.

The following scenarios are examples of behaviours that teachers and leadership team members are dealing with at the school in which this study was conducted.

Bella

Bella is a 15 year Māori student who lives with her dad and step mum. She was a regular truant and moved out of home to live with her boyfriend. Early during the year Bella was stood down for attending school under the influence of drugs. Less than a month later she was stood down for assaulting another student. At this stage she has not achieved any NCEA credits. She refused to return to school, did not return home and is now having a baby.

Adam

As a Year 9 student Adam lived with his dad. He is 13 years old and is Māori. During the first month of school he was stood down for supplying drugs in school. His second stand down was six weeks later for assaulting another student. At this time he was moved to Alternative Education. Adam returned to the school for Year 10 but things did not begin well, he was stood down early in the year for threatening to assault a student. A physical assault on a student and physical aggression shown towards a teacher who was trying to intervene was the reason for his second stand down. The family removed the student to enrol in another school.

Peter

Peter is a 14 year old NZ European student who lives at home with Mum. He arrived at the school half way through Term 2 from Alternative Education in Wellington. Within the week he was stood down for physical assault of a young girl on the bus. At a restorative meeting he showed violence towards the Police Officer and Principal. During the meeting he stood up, walked out and slammed the door, breaking the hinges in the

process. He was referred to Alternative Education but has since disappeared and been referred to the MOE.

The school wanted to examine a process that could give an alternative to stand downs. The links between what was occurring in the community with Youth Court attendance, and the comments made by Youth Court Judges about the impact of suspensions on students, were motivating factors to drive change. It was time to look for a collaborative approach between multiple agencies and whānau to support schools in their bid to keep students in education and to support students to remain at school.

Chapter 2 - Overview of this project

This research came about in a secondary school context. The school is a low decile state school in a rural area. The roll is approximately 800. The ethnic breakdown of the students is 56% Māori and 39% NZ European with 5% of Pasifika, Asian and other.

There is a lot of pressure on principals and BOT's to keep students at school in a low socio economic rural community where the options available to excluded students are limited to alternative education or attention from other social services including Police and Social Welfare. Exclusion has to be the last resort. In a small community, with only a limited number of other secondary schools, a second chance at another school is unlikely, as word travels fast. In the school where this research took place, an increasing number of serious behaviour issues, including physical assault and drug use, were being reported to the Senior Leadership Team, and the Deputy Principal with the behaviour portfolio was under pressure, while resources were limited. The current practice would have seen these students moved through the behaviour management plan, escalated to a suspension or at the very least a succession of stand downs. As the judges noted, and others (including the school) agree, this is not the best thing for the young people in such trouble. Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) propose that 'the central responsibility of schools is to prepare the children of today to be citizens of tomorrow' (p.104); if this is so, the school has fallen short of its responsibility when a student is excluded from school.

The leadership of the school in question was well aware of this responsibility, and so, after a period of debate, it was decided to trial a model of the Youth Development Circle (YDC). The school was already committed to developing a whole school restorative culture, and this proposed project fitted well with the strategic direction of the school, which was also well aware of its commitments to its local community.

The school had been on a restorative path for the last five years but within that time many staff and BOT member changes had occurred. This meant that there needed to be many conversations with individuals on the

Leadership Team, selected staff and BOT members before the plan could be introduced, to explain the proposed model and to gain support for the trial. There was a feeling among some staff members that the RP model of student behaviour management was not working, as these very “naughty” students were not “fixed” by RJC’s. These teachers believed that students did not learn from their actions. The students continued to re-offend and did not fit into the school culture, so they should be “moved on”. The process took several months but once a few key staff members were willing to accept the YDC plan, the majority followed suit. As with the RJC, the YDC must be an extension of the school’s behaviour management plan that sits within a restorative framework and cannot be just an add-on intervention. A key aspect of the restorative culture is listening. Listening to the student, the teachers, the family members and the community and devising a plan together. It is not about sanctions and punishments and making sweeping judgements about the student and their whānau, it is about working together to find strategies to provide the best outcome for everyone involved.

The evidence from the school pastoral data showed that incidents of a serious nature were on the increase and so a change was required to the behavioural management plan to deal with this escalating behaviour. The BOT and principal certainly would not support any number of students being ‘kicked out’ of school as keeping the student roll numbers up was a priority. This is a tension in many New Zealand schools where funding is based on roll numbers.

The addition of the intervention of the new YDC was seen as an experiment to test if the students who were potentially going to be suspended could not only remain at school but could improve their educational outcomes. The trial would take place over one full school year. The YDC would be placed around any student who received two consecutive stand downs and was on the verge of suspension – this was a requirement if they wanted to remain at the school. The results of this research would be presented to the BOT and Senior Leadership who would determine at the end of the one year trial whether the YDC as an

intervention would continue to be used as part of the school's behaviour management processes, to support students and families in the future.

According to Drewery (2014) the introduction of conferencing practices and restorative principles into schools in several countries is now well advanced and the outcomes of these initiatives are reportedly successful. However there are concerns raised by Gray (2005) that the RJC's do not change the very high level of social exclusion that is already being felt by the young person and their family. This reflected the school's experience. The school found that the more the student offended and the more serious the crime, the more isolated the student and family became. The student would spend more and more time out of class resulting in falling further behind in their academic studies which in turn led to increased feelings of disconnection to both their peers and to school in general. Every time a student was sent home a member of the family would be required to take time off work to supervise their child at home, attend another meeting at school on the student's return and generally by this stage families were at the end of their ability to cope and felt deep despair with nowhere to turn. These young people and their families needed to be supported through the ongoing process of the student's behaviour modification as significant behaviour change would not occur through a RJC on its own. The YDC trial would provide an intervention for students who reached the maximum number of days out of school on stand down and were pending suspension. It was anticipated that this trial would provide an opportunity for the student, their family and the wider community to work together in a more inclusive way.

A presentation was made to the principal and BOT, describing the proposed model and the way the process would fit within the current behaviour management practices of the school. The school leadership was fully supportive of the introduction of the YDC. The BOT were particularly interested in the development of improved relationships and partnerships with the wider community, which would provide opportunities for the building of authentic and lasting relationships focused on improving student outcomes. A small budget of \$2000, to cover the food expenses,

was allocated to support the process. It was felt that in keeping with hospitality (manaakitanga) that this inclusion would be helpful.

While in the planning stages of the intervention, an approach was made to a member of the Local Police, who happened to be at the school on other business, to share the YDC concept. The school had already been given the services of a constable to support RJC's by the District Commander, so both the police and the local community had an understanding that the school was one with a restorative culture. The enthusiasm of the Police person was evident, and this to a presentation outlining the vision and proposed process of the YDC being made to members of the force at the District Police level.. The presentation took place at the local Rūnanga office early in March with key members of the organisation also in attendance. The school data presented showed that 90% of the students stood down were Māori. The senior members of the Police were impressed with the restorative approach and were able to see the wider potential of the proposed YDC. They were prepared to allocate police human resources to support the project. In addition, members of the local Rūnanga showed a genuine interest in the intervention and offered their connection with and support from the iwi. It was from this meeting that the Māori responsiveness advisor, a Police person based at the Rūnanga office to support the local community and to develop iwi interventions, was successful in the recruitment of a kaumātua for the YDC's. The presence of the Kaumātua was another strong influence in the ensuing project.

Once the proposed process was accepted, the format of the YDC needed to be finalised. The basic idea of the YDC developed for the school in this research was to translate the restorative justice conference circle from criminal justice into the educational environment. The main difference in the school version was that the circle would be an ongoing feature of the young person's life rather than an ad hoc group of people brought together to deal with a one-off criminal offence. As this was a new concept, the model itself needed to be created. There were three models researched that contributed to the final model used. As far as can be determined, although aspects of each can be found in current practices around the world, all three of these models were historically only ever proposals; they

were not actual working models. They were the Braithwaite Model of YDC, the McElrea School Community Conference Model and the Hui Whakatika Model.

The final model used in the research included purposefully selected aspects of each of the three proposed models. John Braithwaite's proposed YDC was fundamentally about building a group of responsible people around a problematic young person. Braithwaite (2004), who has written extensively on Restorative Justice, suggested that the circle meet regularly, more frequently at first, and then regularly over the student's remaining time at school. A key concept that Braithwaite (2004) emphasised was that a circle brought together the people the student most loved and those s/he most identified with to work together to get the best outcome. The circle would consist of Core and Casual members who would be asked up front to make a commitment to attend all circle meetings until the young person transitioned to further education or moved into employment. The circle would continue to be there should the young person request a circle or find themselves in trouble with the police. Braithwaite (2004) goes so far as to say that the hidden curriculum of Youth Development Circles includes giving the student an opportunity to learn and listen, to accommodate the perspectives of other people when setting their own goals. Co-constructed goal setting was a focus of this proposed model. The Braithwaite model of the YDC was initially proposed to be trialled in a disadvantaged high school in Australia and then from there if success was achieved the YDC could be introduced into Primary and High schools that were not disadvantaged. The argument was that a YDC process was less invasive than an adversarial legal process and was driven by a combination of school, whānau and community representatives coming together in a formalised "community of care" around the young person. The young person had the opportunity to build community and this in turn fostered personal growth and improved educational outcomes in a supported environment. According to Braithwaite (2004) the circle emphasis would change over the years. To begin with the focus of the circles would be more on relationship and educational challenges progressing through to an emphasis of securing employment towards the

end of the student's life at school. If a student was not doing so well academically the emphasis of the circle could change earlier to begin the integration of that young person into the work place. The core members would focus on engaging casual members within the YDC who might be able to offer work based training and employment skills.

The aspects of Judge McElrea's (1996) proposed SCC that contributed to the YDC in the research were that the circle participants were extended further by suggesting the inclusion of a Youth Court Advocate, Police Officer, and a kaumātua.

The final proposed model that has contributed to the YDC was one taken from the publication produced by the Waikato University Restorative Practice Development Team, called the Hui Whakatika. Aspects of this proposed model were selected specifically for their described culturally responsive nature. The school being involved in Te Kotahitanga Project, as well as the majority of the young people offending being Māori, were important influences on ensuring cultural protocols and tikanga were followed. Te Kotahitanga Project philosophies of culturally responsive and relational pedagogy and the focus of supporting Māori students to achieve educational success as Māori were contributing factors in the choice to include the Hui Whakatika proposed model (MOE, 2007; MOE 2015). These cultural aspects were emphasised through the cultural processes of the proposed Waikato University Hui Whakatika Model.

Key elements selected from the Hui Whakatika proposed model were the use of the process of separating in everyone's thinking the person from the problem and is based on the embodiment of the narrative therapy principle of externalising the problem (The Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003). According to Drewery (2004) "the deliberate displacement or non-essentialising of the self is encapsulated in the narrative therapeutic tenet that 'the problem is the problem and the person is not the problem' and this can be used to great therapeutic effect" (p. 340). This gives a name to the problem which sits outside the young person and the members can look at the problem objectively. The effects of the problem can then be described so that the young person does not feel further

disempowered. The aspect of “seeking new shoots”, which was also parts of the proposed Waikato University Model, was selected specifically to support the growth of a new identity with the young person. Support for the development of a new, or at least a less problematic identity was seen as a particularly important aspect of the proposed new YDC process.

The combination of selected aspects of the three proposed models led to the creation of a culturally responsive restorative model that included core members (including people who the young person most loved) and casual members of the school, whānau and wider community. The community members could include a Police Officer, social worker, kaumātua or any person with specific skills that could be utilised to support the young person. This group of people would meet on a regular basis, more frequently at first, with the time between meetings increasing as the student progressed through the year. The process was extremely important, as what is said at the conference and the process followed before and after must be consistent if the outcomes are to be sustainable. This was reinforced by Drewery (2004), who said that “from a psychological perspective, it is clear to us that there is a strong link between the process of the conference and the success and longevity of its outcomes” (p. 338).

The Youth Development Circle: final model

A full description of the proposed final model developed for the research was as follows:

The first circle meeting of the YDC would follow a modified Hui Whakatika with the only major modification being the absence of a victim. (If a victim was involved as part of the stand down, a RJC would have been held prior to the YDC to work through that restoration. The YDC meeting is based on a fresh beginning with a clear focus on the future.)

All YDC's would be opened in a way that created an atmosphere of respect and seriousness and made it a sacred space. The way we chose to achieve this would be by an offer to start with karakia. This form of opening would establish a connection with the cultural background of the

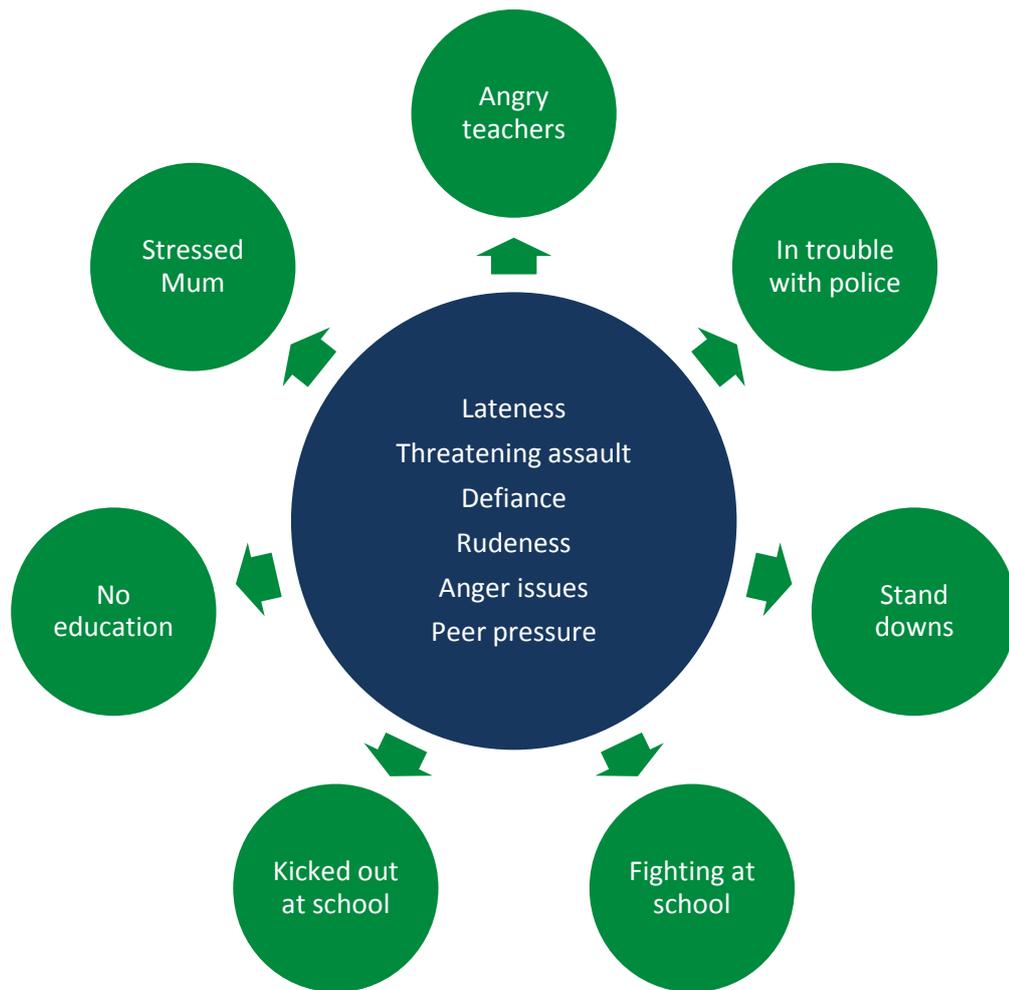
young person and their family. If the young person or family were of another ethnicity, that would be taken in to account and the protocols adjusted. In order to establish an atmosphere of trust and a constructive work environment, each person would introduce themselves and express their hopes for what would come from the YDC.

A large circle would be drawn on the whiteboard; the inside of the circle filled with the specific problems identified for the student. It would be important that everyone contributed to this aspect of the meeting, including the person affected, as this would ensure the problem was removed and separated from the person. Once everyone had had the opportunity to say what they thought the problems were (there is seldom a single problem), the facilitator would then ask the group to describe the problem in a few words, thus naming the problem. A few examples of what some problems could be are provided below:



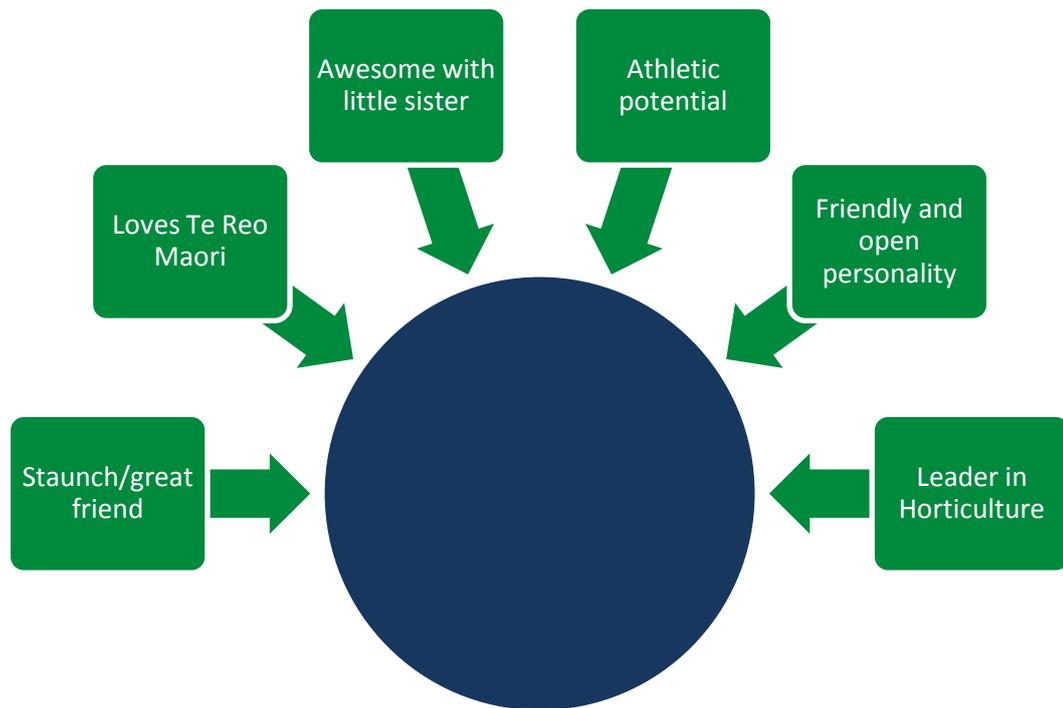
Mapping the effects of the problem would be the next stage; the aim of this step is to gauge the impact of the problem. The aim here is for everyone to get a chance to express how they had been affected by the problem. At the same time everyone also gets the chance to learn about how others had been affected. The tone of this inquiry is critical and the questioning must be in a relaxed not punitive tone.

The arrows from the circle would be drawn pointing outwards from the circle in which the problem has been named. Examples of mapping the problem could include:

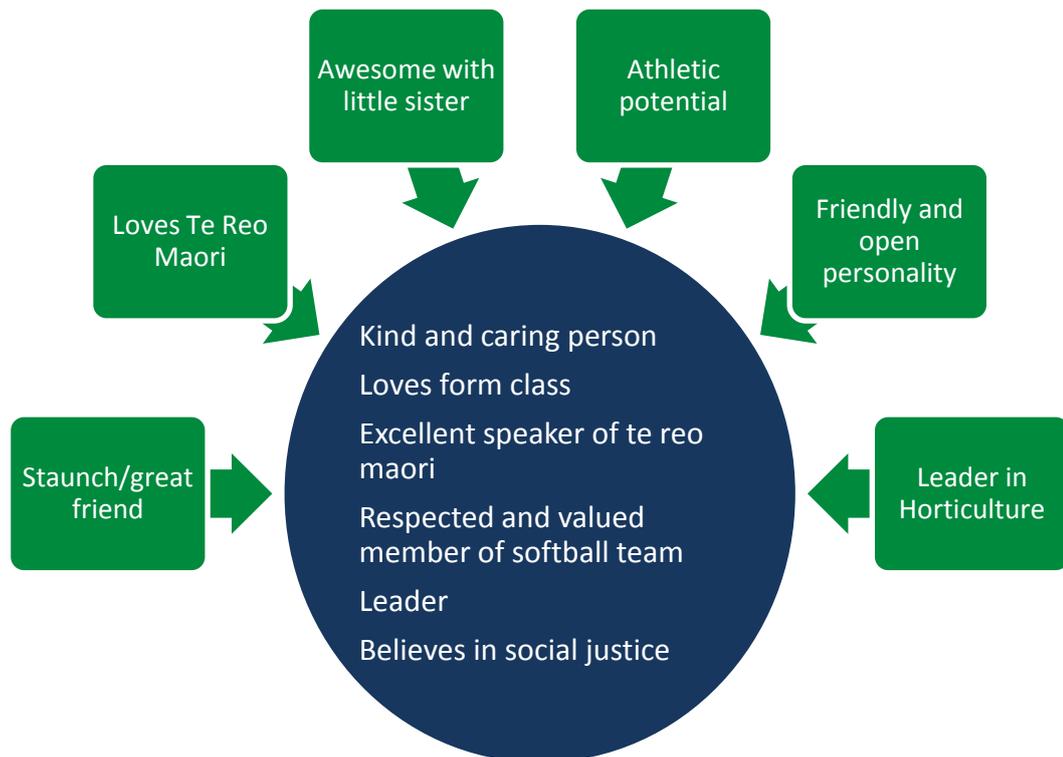


The next part of the meeting is about ‘seeking new shoots’. This involves brainstorming the skills, talents and attributes of the student and what these would look like at school and at home, to find exceptions to the problem story. These ideas are placed around the outside of a new circle on the whiteboard. The idea is that these descriptions are likely to be in conflict with the negative descriptions that have been offered in the conference to date (Drewery, 2004). The purpose of this step is that these skills, talents and attributes are potentially aspects of the student being the person described in the centre of the circle. These descriptions would become the resources which can be focused on to move forwards and grow the student’s new, more positive identity. Arrows from these positive aspects of the young person point into towards the centre of the new circle. Again it is important that everyone present contributes so that everyone can be part of the solution.

For this part of the meeting the circle would be filled in last. Examples of possible skills and attributes are provided below:



At this time the facilitator would ask what everyone knew about the young person that did not fit with the problem story. These ideas would be written into the centre of the circle as alternatives to the descriptions of the young person fostered by the problem story. When the series of exceptions have been mapped onto the whiteboard diagram, the words that described the young person in more positive ways would be noted inside the circle.



So now on the whiteboard there would be two circles side by side.

At the end of this activity the facilitator would ask about the difference between the two stories and what circle members had learned by seeing these two stories side by side? The student would then be asked which story they preferred. Which story would the young person want to emphasize more in the future?

Once this aspect of the circle meeting was concluded the circle meeting format would follow the concepts of John Braithwaite’s proposed process for working with young people who find themselves in this kind of serious trouble. Three or four short term goals would be co-constructed and the student would be required to reach these goals before the next meeting. Individual members of the development circle would be assigned and responsible for supporting the student to complete each of the goals. At this stage it would be important for everyone involved in the circle to take their part in supporting the young person to maintain the different story and support the development of the young person’s “new” identity. The circle diagrams would be used at the first meeting and revisited during following meetings if the student regressed in behaviour and needed reassurance about following the “new” identity path. If new negative

behaviours developed the whole process would need to begin again, identifying the “new problem” and finding “new shoots”.

There would now be an opportunity for a final comment from each circle member and the next meeting date would be set.

The meeting would be closed with Karakia as it began and would be followed by a sharing of Kai. Sharing food and drink is a well- established part of Māori hui that demonstrates the values of relationships of care and hospitality, and is called manaakitanga. It is important during this time for people to relax together, and the provision of the afternoon tea or breakfast at the end of the meeting would provide an opportunity for connections and relationships to further develop between circle members.

The telling of the story, naming the problem and seeking new shoots was only ever a part of the first meeting unless there was another serious problem of another nature that occurred between meetings and the problem needed to be revisited.

For the second and subsequent meetings the format would follow a less complex process. These meetings would be focused on the feedback from the school, which would have been collected, on the student management system KAMAR by the facilitator, prior to the meeting and on the success of the goal setting.

All Circle Members would then be asked to feedback on any positives or issues that might have occurred during the time between the last meeting and the present.

The pastoral feedback that would have been collected on the school student management system (KAMAR) would now be presented and discussed.

The student would then read their goals set at the last meeting and comment on the level of success.

A temperature gauge would be used at this time during each meeting as an indicator of goal achievement. Level 1 indicated the least success of goal achievement through to Level 4 which indicated all goals successfully

achieved. The student and Circle Members together would decide the level of success each meeting.



The next set of goals would then be set and these could include revisiting goals that might not have been achieved at the previous meeting.

A next meeting date would be set and the time frame of the meeting would vary dependent on the feedback from the circle members, the KAMAR pastoral feedback, the achievement of goals and the feeling of the student and whānau. This could range from anywhere between 2 to 8 weeks.

Finally the meeting would close as it began with karakia and would be followed by the sharing of kai.

The Structure of the Proposed YDC

The skeleton structure of the proposed YDC process is described above, however, there are some key ingredients and skills that would be necessary before a person should leap into running a YDC at a school.

The facilitator, in particular, must have the skills of respectful inquiry before beginning to use the YDC intervention. The model used for the YDCs was chosen as it focuses specifically on growing a new identity in the young person so this skill was paramount. Kecskemeti (2010) noted that after teaching the skills of respectful inquiry to teachers they “learned to look for, and offer, new identities to students rather than noticing only negative aspects of a student” (p. 106). Drewery (2004) stressed that the conference process was just as important as what was said at the conference and the process must be consistent if the outcomes are to be sustainable.

When involved within a circle the language used by all members is imperative. The language must focus on the problem being the behaviour and not the wrong doer as a person. Language used must find ways to engage the young person in conversation and to talk about what is going on for them without them feeling everything is their fault. The use of open and non-judgemental questioning is critical within the YDC process. Drewery and Kecskemeti (2010) call this

A stance of respectful curiosity that focuses on finding out what is going on, recognising our assumptions might not always be correct. This stance recognises diversity and the fact that different people make meaning differently- they come from different backgrounds and use different tools for understanding what is going on (p. 105).

If a member of the circle is unable to speak respectfully in an agentic manner they will need to be asked to change their position and if unable to do so, will need to be asked to leave the intervention to allow the student to feel safe to grow a new identity. An agentic manner is one that leaves open the option that individuals have the capacity to make choices in the world, rather than taking on a tone of instruction or, worse, admonishment.

Braithwaite (2004) proposed that in an ideal world all students at the school would have a YDC around them rather than selecting the 'bad' students. Whilst that was an honourable proposition, for the purpose of this research it was necessary to select just a few students to manage the time required for all members within a circle. It was also felt that at least 80% of the students at the school had a natural and active community of care around them that included protective factors such as responsible significant adults. The students chosen had to have had a minimum of two 'stand downs' and were about to be removed from school. It was an opportunity to attempt a different strategy with Māori students particularly, as the stand down rates for Māori students at the school was an issue. Unlike any conferencing that occurred at the school previously, it was anticipated that the YDC would be a permanent feature of the young person's school life. The meetings would potentially continue until either

the young person moved on to tertiary education or transitioned into employment.

Now that the BOT and Leadership Team had accepted the plan, the presentations made to both the local Rūnanga and the superiors within the local Police, most of the teaching staff on board, the proposed model of the YDC researched and the final model developed, the importance of the required language specifications defined and the criteria determined for when a YDC would be used, it was time to look into how the research would be conducted.

Chapter 3 describes the research method chosen, the types of data collected, how participants were selected and the ethical considerations required to ensure the school, in which the research was conducted, and all the participants remained safe and their identity protected.

Chapter 3 – Research Approach

A mixed method case study approach focusing on three students was used for this research. This included the use of both quantitative data and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected before each YDC, through the student management system KAMAR and included behaviour, achievement and attendance data. All subject teachers were asked to report on behaviour, attendance and achievement, through the KAMAR pastoral system, before every YDC meeting. Qualitative data included evaluative interviews with students and their community of care. Participants in the circles were interviewed at the end of the school year (please see the interview protocol in the appendices). The interviews were held in a private situation and were recorded to ensure quotations were accurate. Each participant was given a copy of the questions to prepare for the interview. Minutes were kept from each circle meeting. As leader of the project I kept a reflexive journal in which I recorded both positive and negative participatory, procedural and process details.

The mixed method approach allowed for triangulation of the different data and ensured a robust analysis of the information collected. The achievement, attendance and behavioural data provided educational outcomes that could be measured. The interview data gathered information on the success or not of the YDC from an individual perspective and provided feed forward around process for future use. The reflective journal provided the day to day finer details which needed to be attended to in between meetings, such as the student forgetting what their goals were so a notebook was provided so they could record and reflect on the goals. This was invaluable when trialling the YDC model as there were many small amendments required over the year, and keeping track of them would have been difficult without the journal. These reflections are further discussed in Chapter 6.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and approval given from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Once the proposed model was developed and ethical approval was given the selection of participants was required.

Selection of Participants

As the Deputy Principal with responsibility for the behaviour management portfolio, the researcher had access to student pastoral and academic data. It was important not to exploit the relationship and to ensure that the student was not disadvantaged through their participation or refusal to participate. All participation was voluntary and based on interest in the outcomes of the students and the project. Permission to conduct the research project and access to the students for this purpose was initially sought from the Principal, and the Board of Trustees agreed to support the project (Appendix 5). My fellow Deputy Principal was available to hear any concerns of students, whānau or members of the student's community of care that might arise as the project continued. None availed themselves of this opportunity.

Recruitment

To recruit participants for the study I selected three circles that were placed around students as a mandatory part of their behaviour pathway within the school. Although the school had determined that the students were required to participate in a YDC if they wanted to remain at the school, it was important that I separated the research project from the BOT trial requirement. The circles would go ahead anyway, but I needed to ask the students and their whānau if they would be willing for me to research the progress of the circle.

I initially met with the student involved and gave them an introductory letter (Appendix 1) describing the project, my reason for the proposed study and the consent form. The student was able to take the documentation home to decide if s/he was willing to participate in the research. A follow up meeting was set up at a time and place that suited the student to answer any further questions. If s/he agreed to participate s/he was asked to sign the consent form (Appendix 2). If the student was willing to be involved in the proposed study I then met individually with all the members of their

community of care at a time and place that suited them, providing them also with an introductory letter (Appendix 3) describing the project, my reason for the proposed study, a description of what a YDC would look like (Appendix 4) and the consent form (Appendix 3A). A follow up meeting time and place was set that suited each participant to answer any questions that arose before they were asked to sign the consent form. At the follow up meeting they were asked firstly if they would be happy to allow me to use the minutes that were recorded during each circle meeting for research purposes and secondly if they would be willing to participate in an evaluative interview (Appendix 6 and 6A) before the end of 2014. I made it very clear that there was absolutely no obligation to be part of the research, I did not put any pressure on the student, whānau or any member of the student's community of care to be involved in the research, either explicitly or subconsciously and I made it clear, that their identity would be protected as far as possible.

When each participant agreed to participate in the research I asked them to sign the informed consent letter. If the student did not want to be involved in the proposed research I offered an alternative Circle. This was to ensure that the student still received the support required to remain at school and for the whānau to feel fully supported regardless of not being involved in the research. The student was not disadvantaged in any way and they continued to be fully supported through the YDC intervention without being part of the trial

I held all the minutes from all circles. The minutes of the previous meeting were shared at the following meeting and any amendments made at that time. A reflective journal was kept containing details about the effectiveness of the planning and set up of the circle, the level of engagement, commitment and participation of each participant within the circle and the follow up and communication post circle and how each of these directly or indirectly impacted on the success of the Circle.

The student and whānau consent included seeking permission to gather achievement, attendance and behaviour data about the student from the school student management system KAMAR. For all participants involved

in a circle, the introductory letter and consent form indicated that minutes of the circle meeting would be available before the next scheduled meeting for amendment or comment. Each participant was given back the transcription of the final evaluative interview and I met them individually to see if they would like anything changed. Once the transcription was agreed to there was no further opportunity to make adjustments. It was made clear in the consent that they may withdraw from the research up until their draft transcript of the evaluative interview had been agreed to and that there were no negative consequences if this was to occur. If a student withdrew at the time of viewing the evaluative transcript the interviews of the other participants in their circle would still be used, but in a more limited way.

Confidentiality

Because of the unique nature of the situations which brought the students to notice within the school, it was deemed of high importance that this study should not identify any of the participants. Accordingly, it was deemed necessary to disguise the situations and the participants. In Bennett's (2011) work "Confidentiality in Clinical Writing: Ethical Dilemmas in Publishing Case Material from Clinical Social Work Practice", Aron (2000) argues that "heavy disguise" of the patient's identity should be an essential requirement for publishing any clinical work. This heavy disguise has been described as the best path to follow to ensure anonymity when researchers wish to use detailed case material of actual clients in writing about serious issues dealt with in clinical practice. Due to the specific nature of the students' backgrounds and behaviour, it could be devastating for them if another student in the school, or others in the community picked up a copy of the research and recognised any of the participants. Accordingly, the decision was made to alter significant details by combining the case studies into one account for the purposes of this thesis. To ensure the accounts were not recognisable and retained anonymity, they were checked by both the attending Police Officer and the Deputy Principal.

Every effort was made to safeguard the identity of the participants. Names were substituted to protect students, whānau, representatives of Iwi and police and student's community of care members' identities. This approach was deliberate. Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles (2008) explored ways in which social researchers managed issues of confidentiality and the contexts in which deliberate and accidental disclosures occurred. Their data was drawn from a qualitative study of social researchers' practices in relation to informed consent. It comprised of 31 individual interviews and six focus groups as well as invited email responses with researchers working with vulnerable groups or with an interest in research ethics. To ensure the protection of participants from the accidental breaking of confidentiality they recommended the process of anonymisation, a process by which identifying details or particulars are removed. In this research study the names of the students are pseudonyms, and details in the narrative accounts were altered, to increase anonymity for the students. The school was not named and only a generic description has been given, without identifying the district. A further strategy used was "to include small distractors which do not alter the verisimilitude of the data but serve to confuse the reader who might wish to track the case to its source" (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 561). For example the caregiver may be constructed as a female rather than a male. Clarke and Wildy (2004) were reporting on a study which examined the way individual principals made sense of, and dealt with, the contextual complexity of their work. In their study they wanted to ensure that neither the school nor the principal were recognisable or traceable, by using small distractors.

Participation

In the present study, there was a possibility that the students might have lost some learning time if the scheduling of the circle needed to be during the school day, so to prevent this all circles were to be held outside school hours. This would minimise the loss of learning time; however it was also dependent on the availability of the community of care members, whānau, Iwi members and police representatives.

Participants participated in circle meetings on a regular or needs basis. The length of time involved in the YDC intervention and the number of meetings held for each student varied. If a participant agreed to participate I ensured that the process was clear and a consent form was signed before involvement in the research. Students would have suffered no consequences for declining to participate in the study or withdrawing part way through. Participants could have withdrawn by phoning or emailing the Deputy Principal or me and all contact details were made clear on the introductory letter. Participants had access to all minutes of circle meetings and were able to ask for amendments to be made to these. Participants received a draft copy of the transcripts from the final interview as soon as it was available. Each circle member was met with to ensure they were happy with their transcript. After this meeting they were not able to change the transcript. Participants will have access to the final copy through the University of Waikato's Research Commons database.

Quantitative Data:

This will be presented in graph form for each student involved in a YDC.

Attendance data will be presented as a percentage of attending school.

Behaviour data will be presented as a number of positive entries or behaviour incident referrals from classroom teachers, Deans and SLT entered into the KAMAR.

Achievement data will be displayed as easTTle results and the number of credits, either Junior Certificate of Educational Achievement (JCEA) if junior students or National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) for the senior student.

Qualitative Data:

Throughout the case studies, the names, backgrounds and finer details have been altered to ensure the students' and participants' confidentiality and anonymity. However, within this study the seriousness of the problems, the emotional intensity of the interactions and the flavour of the relationships that were developed have been preserved.

Evaluative interview transcripts from participants have been presented within the analysis of findings and the information collated and grouped according to the issue addressed.

Chapter 4 - The Case Study Stories

This chapter begins by presenting the three student stories, which have had details altered, as an introduction to the issues that triggered the Circles. The stories describe the background of the student, why the student was involved in a circle to begin with and who was involved in their circles. With the exception of the individuals specifically named, all core members such as the Police person, the Dean with an interest in RP and the volunteer social worker, were consistent and attended all student circles. The only time this differed was if a core member was unavailable due to another commitment or sickness. Casual members attending the circles varied for each student and were dependant on the skills that were required to support that student at the time. For example if a student was struggling in maths, an invitation of a maths teacher as a casual member to provide tutorials was actioned. All YDCs were facilitated by the researcher in the role of Deputy Principal.

The student stories are followed by a single thread narrative which included a combination of all three students circles mixed together. This thread is given as a representation of the YDC process and examples of actual developments and feedback that occurred within the circles throughout the year. The thread does include the first YDC of the students, which as described above consists of the 'naming of the problem and seeking new shoots' and takes significantly longer than the subsequent circle meetings. Included in this section are some general examples of the types of feedback received from teachers on KAMAR, feedback from community members, the types of goals that were co-constructed and reported back on and the use of the temperature gauge as an indicator of goal achievement that occurred at the meetings. Following this I will come back to present some details to explain why some amendments to the circle process were required.

The Case Studies

One student was part of the YDC intervention for the whole year beginning during Week 3 of Term 1. This student had a total of 11 circle meetings over the year. The other two students were involved in the YDC

intervention from the end of Term 1 and they continued for the year. Each of these students had six circle meetings in total.

Sam

Sam is a 13 year old Māori student who has been living with her Dad since she was 3 months old. She lives in a Mongrel Mob neighbourhood and has been on the periphery of a gang culture all her life. She entered our school achieving at an academic level 2 years behind her cohort in the asTTle entrance reading, mathematics and writing tests. She was placed in a form class with a young, supportive but firm, female Māori English teacher. She had come with an aggressive pastoral history from her Intermediate school so careful placement was imperative. She was separated from students who antagonised her on the recommendations of the contributing school. There was also a problem that many students and their whānau asked specifically not to be in the same class as Sam due to issues over the previous two years, so placement was tricky. Sam attended the Year 9 Powhiri to be welcomed to our school along with 160 other students on at the beginning of 2014.

Why use the Youth Development Circle intervention?

On day 2 at school, Sam was “bunking” in a nearby Park and a Year 10 student reported her. Sam was very angry about “being narked on” and threatened this student; she told her she was going to “drag her off the bus to get her”. As a result Sam was stood down from school for one day. On her return a restorative conference was held with Sam and the victim, their whānau, Sam’s form teacher and a member of the senior leadership team. During the conference Sam acknowledged what she had done. Her Dad showed his disappointment with Sam and was very supportive of the school. Sam came back to school with a contract to work within; she was watched carefully and supported where she needed to be. Things went well for 9 days and she followed the agreement successfully; Sam’s Dad even received a positive letter acknowledging her work in English and particularly her lovely manners. On day 10, Sam assaulted another student at the school sports. A three day stand down was given and the Principal felt that this student really did not fit the culture of the school and

suggested Alternative Education might be the most appropriate path to ensure the safety of our school community. Another restorative conference was held. This time the level was stepped up and a member of the Local Police attended along with Dad, an auntie, the victim and her whānau, the Principal and a Deputy Principal. During the meeting the police officer made it very clear that the victim could lay charges of assault if they were not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting. Sam, her auntie and Dad showed huge remorse. The victim and her family felt the process was helpful and generously asked the school to reconsider excluding Sam from school. Sam had written a letter to us all and read it at the meeting indicating that she was really prepared to try and change her behaviour if we would consider allowing her to remain at the school. The Senior Leadership Team had predetermined that the only way she was able to stay was if Sam and her family agreed to a Youth Development Circle being placed around her. This meant a significant commitment of time by the whānau over the rest of Sam's school life. The family were very tentative at first and actually turned down the opportunity initially. It was at this stage that the Principal told the family that either she had a circle around her or found another school. After a hesitant beginning the family took up the school's offer to keep Sam at school and committed fully to the process.

Who was involved?

Sam's first Youth Development Circle was held 4 days later. Her core circle members were Dad, an Auntie (who was also her League coach), a member of the Local Police (who was also the Māori Responsiveness Advisor), Sam's Form Teacher, a Dean with an interest in Restorative Practice and myself as the facilitator. A kaumātua also joined our meetings after the first one. A volunteer Social Worker joined the circles mid-way through the year and was a valuable support person who could drop into Sam's class if there were any issues developing. There were no casual members at the first meeting, however for subsequent meetings her Nutrition and Art teachers were irregular attenders. These circle members remained constant for the whole year.

At the time of meeting 1 Sam's asTTle reading level was reported at 3B, writing at 2A and Maths 3P.

Sam's attendance was at 76%.

Negative pastoral entries in the KAMAR student management system totalled 4. These were for unacceptable behaviour, having a disrespectful attitude, threatening another student and physical assault on a student.

Positive entries in KAMAR totalled 1. This was for working well in English.

Rangi

Rangi is a 15 year old Māori student who has been at this school for Year 9, Year 10 and now is in Year 11. She lives with her eldest sister and two younger brothers. At the end of Year 9 Rangi achieved asTTle results that included maths 3P, writing 3B and reading 4B. There were 34 negative entries on her KAMAR pastoral record and not 1 positive entry. By the end of Year 10 Rangi had achieved a 4P in asTTle reading, 4P in Maths and a 5P in writing. This increase in asTTle results showed positive progress as the expected improvement is one sublevel per year. There were 54 negative entries which included 2 formal time outs and 2 stand downs, 1 for verbal assault and 1 for being under the influence of drugs at school. There was 1 positive entry.

Why use the Youth Development Circle intervention?

It was early in her Year 11 year and after 7 negative entries by the beginning of March, Rangi and her whānau were invited to be part of a Youth Development Circle. At first Rangi and her older sister were strongly against the concept for many reasons. Rangi's sister was in denial about what was happening in Rangi's academic and extra-curricular life and also she believed that it would be just a further opportunity for the teachers at the school to have another 'go' at Rangi. After some thinking time however they both agreed to participate.

Who was involved?

Rangi's first Youth Development Circle was held 2 weeks after the initial discussion. Her core circle members included Rangi's sister. Rangi's History teacher attended the first meeting as a casual member but did not

attend again, a friend of Rangī's sister, who is close to Rangī, attended on an irregular basis. The core members remained constant for the whole year.

At the time of meeting 1 Rangī had 0 credits for NCEA Level 1.

Rangī's attendance was at 80%.

Negative pastoral entries in the KAMAR student management system totalled 7. These were for a variety of offences including attendance issues, continual disobedience and defiance.

Positive entries in KAMAR was 0.

Timoti

Timoti is a 14 year old Māori student who has been at this school for Year 9. He lives with his Nan and 5 siblings. In the asTTle entrance tests Timoti achieved 3P for reading and 4B for writing and at the end of Year 9 he achieved 4B in writing and reading. There were 26 negative pastoral entries on his KAMAR pastoral record including 2 stand downs, 1 for unacceptable behaviour and 1 for theft. At the beginning of Year 10 Timoti did not complete the asTTle reading and writing and achieved a 3P in asTTle Maths, indicating little progress. By the first Youth Development Circle there were 17 negative entries on his KAMAR pastoral record and not 1 positive entry. These include 2 stand downs, 1 for assault and the other for defiance.

Why use the Youth Development Circle intervention?

It was the beginning of March, after the 2 stand downs, when Timoti and his Nan were advised that the next step in the restorative process at the school was to be part of a YDC. Timoti and his Nan were very hesitant and it took 3 meeting dates to actually get them to attend the first meeting.

Who was involved?

Timoti's core circle members were his Nan, his form teacher, the volunteer social worker, a police representative and a Dean interested in restorative practice. The circle members remained constant for the whole year.

At the time of meeting 1 Timoti's attendance was at 76%.

Negative pastoral entries in the KAMAR student management system totalled 17. These included: Physical assault on a student, verbal assault on a teacher, defiance and refusing to comply with class conditions. Positive entries in KAMAR totalled 0.

The story of a YDC:

The next section is the single thread narrative of a YDC which will include snippets of actual details and events from all three student YDC's that occurred over the year.

The First Meeting:

The meeting began with karakia and introductions.

A few examples of naming the problem in these three case studies were:

“Lateness”, “threatening assault”, “defiance”, “rudeness”, “peer pressure” and “laziness”.

The circle was drawn on the whiteboard; the inside of the circle was filled with the specific problems identified for the student.

The next step in the process was to gauge the impact of the problem.

A few examples of mapping the problem for these three case studies included:

“Kicked out of school”, “angry/disappointed Dad”, “fighting at school”, “no NCEA credits” and “being in trouble with the police”.

The next part was about ‘seeking new shoots’.

A few examples of the spokes for seeking new shoots for these three case studies included:

“Friendly and open personality”, “cooks dinner at home”, “staunch friend”, “great League team member”.

The facilitator asked about what everyone knew about that does not fit with the problem story. These ideas were written in the centre of the circle

as alternative descriptions of the person to the descriptions fostered by the problem story.

When a series of exceptions had been mapped onto the whiteboard diagram the words describing the young person in more positive ways were written inside the circle.

These included:

“S/he loves Form Class”, “excellent speaker of Te Reo Māori”, “believes in social justice” and “he is an amazing artist”.

So now on the whiteboard there were two circles side by side.

The facilitator asked about the difference between the two stories.

The student was then asked which story did the young person prefer? Which one did s/he want to emphasise more in the future?

The answer on all occasions was the green circle, the circle that looked towards the future.

Goals were now co-constructed. Three or four short term goals were set together and the student was required to attempt to reach these goals before the next meeting. Each member of the circle was given the responsibility for supporting the student to complete a goal. The students were each given a note book to record the set goals.

A few examples of goals set at these meetings included:

- To restore a relationship with the Dean who was also the student’s Geography teacher.
- To self-manage and bring all equipment including PE gear, books, pens, homework and to get to school on time.
- Trial for the Junior Netball Teams.
- To leave the phone at home.
- To attend Les Mills Fitness with Social Worker for Saturday Sport

There was now an opportunity for a final comment from each circle member and a few examples of these were:

“Thank you for being here to support my moko and thank you everyone for giving up your time”

“I love these meetings and hearing the good things about her/him”

“I didn’t like that meeting, nothing really good happened at it, I hope you will do better next time so you don’t waste all these people’s time.”

The next meeting date is set in 6-8 weeks if things are going well and in 2 weeks if there are some problems occurring.

The meeting always closed with karakia and followed by a sharing of Kai (Tea and toast if breakfast time, cheese and crackers and fruit if mid-afternoon and pizza or buns if the meeting towards the evening).

Subsequent Meeting Format:

After a karakia and any new introductions all circle members were asked to feedback on the time between the meetings. Examples of this included:

“S/he is fine at home, just normal, s/he just hates school and hates some teachers” (Mum).

“S/he has certainly been keeping out of trouble and has not been sent to the office” (Deputy Principal).

“I hate the PE teacher and hate PE, he picks on me” (student).

The pastoral feedback that was collected on the school student management system (KAMAR) was presented and discussed. Some examples of pastoral comments included:

“Still great in Maths. Completes all set tasks and is a great role model for the others in terms of behaviour and work ethic “(math).

“Fabulous and a role model to other students, a little behind in practical work but that’s because s/he is doing a tricky design. Well mannered, funny, works hard, on time. I will miss him/her when this rotation ends” (Materials Technology).

“Very rude and defiant. Always argues with any request. Gets involved in other student issues that do not concern him/her. Does not complete very much work. S/he always has music and ear phones going” (History).

The student then read the goals set at the last meeting and commented on the level of success.

The temperature gauge was used at this stage, the level being co-constructed by the student and Circle Members. At some point during the year the full continuum of the gauge, from Level 1 (no goals achieved) through to Level 4 (all goals achieved) was represented at a meeting but the majority of the goal setting reflection was at level 3 and 4.

New Goals were then set.

A next meeting date was set and the timing of this was dependent on the feedback from the circle members, the KAMAR pastoral feedback, the achievement of goals and the feeling of the student and whānau. This ranged from 2 weekly to 8 weekly.

The meeting closed with karakia and was followed by a sharing of kai.

Variations to the meeting format:

There were at times changes that occurred to the regular format for a variety of reasons. These generally were due to a breakdown of relationships at home. Some examples of these were:

- The relationship between the student and his/her papa had deteriorated. The meeting needed to be abandoned due to the hostile nature of both parties. The student wanted to go to a party in the weekend and their papa did not want him/her to go and intended to take him/her away with him for the weekend. After 1 and ½ hours it was felt that we were going round in circles. Papa left yelling at the student so we had some private time with the student. We set three very simple goals which s/he wrote in the diary provided.
- The next meeting was cancelled as the student was sent to whānau in Northland. The student returned three weeks later and attended an academic support wananga during the benchmark exams.

- A meeting was abandoned due to a physical violence disclosure made by the student against a male family member. Mum and children needed some space to work through the outcomes. Support by all circle members was offered to the family. The meetings resumed two weeks later. This certainly put another spin on why this student was exhibiting the negative behaviours.

Chapter 5 - The Findings

This section presents the YDC Outcomes for the individuals:

Sam

Over the course of the year Sam was involved in 11 Youth Development Circles. Her attendance at school began at 76% at the time of the first meeting and was at 90% at the final meeting. The highest it reached was 92% at Youth Development Circle meeting number 8 and 9 but it never dropped below the starting point of 76%.

Sam's pastoral entries varied over the year, these ranged from 1 negative and 2 positive to 5 negative and 0 positive. This was never going to be a smooth ride and she was never expected to be perfect, Sam was expected to still make mistakes, it was how we overcame them together that was the key. There were no more stand downs after the circles began. Sam began school believing the only sport she would play would be rugby league as her auntie was the coach. Over the year Sam played netball for the Junior Red Team, the Senior A League Team and the Regional League Team.

In the Junior Graduation Programme (JCEA) Sam achieved 179/200 possible credits, a gold award, the highest award available. Her academic results improved at least one whole level in all three asTTle tests, reading, writing and maths, when entry tests were compared to those for the end of Year 9.

Sam won a prize for contribution to rugby league at the end of year Prize Giving, something that had never happened in her life before. Sam was on her final chance at the school on Day 10. For the rest of the year she never threatened or showed any sign of violence. On numerous occasions she felt angry and agitated however she had developed some key strategies and support mechanisms to manage this. The setting of co-constructed goals meant that Sam was always working positively to achieve them and that gave her a really good sense of success and belonging. There were times when Sam wanted to give up school, the

circles and living with Dad however the community of care surrounding Sam, together with Sam, were able to work through relationship break ups, conflicts, behaviour issues and she was able to complete a very successful year at school. It is extremely doubtful that, without this support, Sam would have remained at the school for the full year, let alone complete the year so successfully.

Rangi

Over the course of the year Rangi was involved in 6 Youth Development Circles. Her attendance at school began at 80% at the time of the first meeting and was at 83% at the final meeting. It is important to note that attendance was never an issue in her time at school.

Rangi's pastoral entries varied over the year, these ranged from 7 negative and 0 positive to 0 negative and 0 positive. There were never any serious offences and Rangi did not receive any stand downs during 2014. At the time of the first circle meeting Rangi had 0 NCEA credits and the feedback/feedforward comments from her teachers, with the exception of Music, were that s/he was not currently working well enough to pass many achievement standards. By the end of the academic year Rangi was in fact only 3 Literacy credits short of achieving the 80 credits for NCEA Level 1.

The range of community support in the meetings, around Rangi and her sister, turned out to be a very valuable resource which Rangi's sister acknowledged at the final meeting. S/he stated that without the Youth Development Circles and aroha that was a part of them, Rangi would most likely have outlived her time at this school, just like some of her other friends. Rangi had an excellent job interview and secured the part time job at a Health Food Shop in town. Her sister was ecstatic and very proud of Rangi.

Timoti

Over the course of the year Timoti was involved in 6 Youth Development Circles. His attendance at school began at 76% at the time of the first

meeting and was at 82% at the final meeting, gradually improving each week.

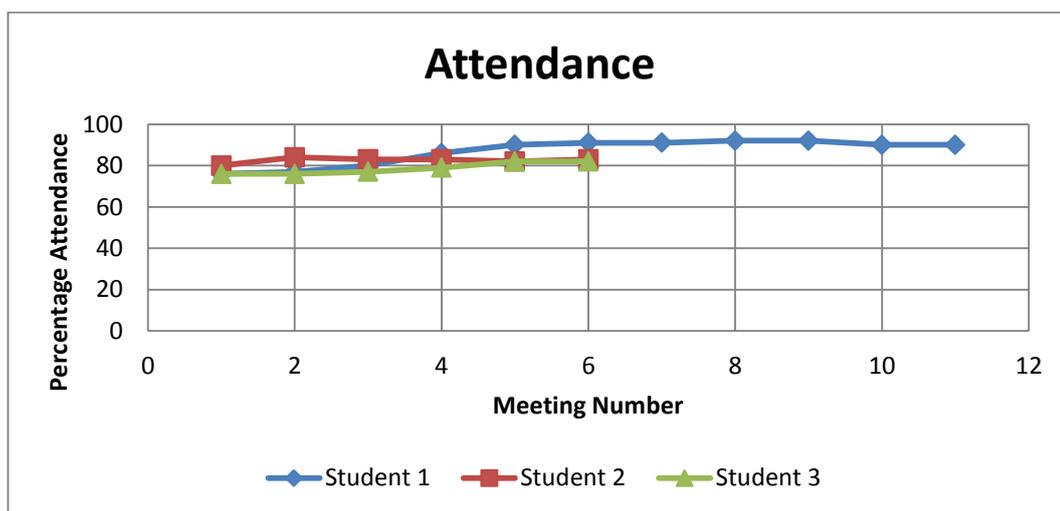
Timoti's pastoral entries varied over the year, these ranged from 17 negative and 0 positive to 1 negative and 0 positive. There were never any serious offences and Timoti did not receive any stand downs during 2014.

Timoti's academic progress is difficult to judge as he did not complete the beginning of the year asTTle tests in Reading and writing. He remained at the same level for Maths which was 3P. Timoti achieved 87 credits out of a possible 200 which meant he did not qualify for a certificate.

After a very reluctant start, three attempts to attend the first meeting, Timoti and his Nan found the process supportive and acknowledged that without the circle meetings the issues in PE with the teacher would have surfaced in a far more serious form and inevitably resulted in Timoti's removal from mainstream education.

Quantitative Data

Attendance for all three students over the course of the meetings is displayed below.

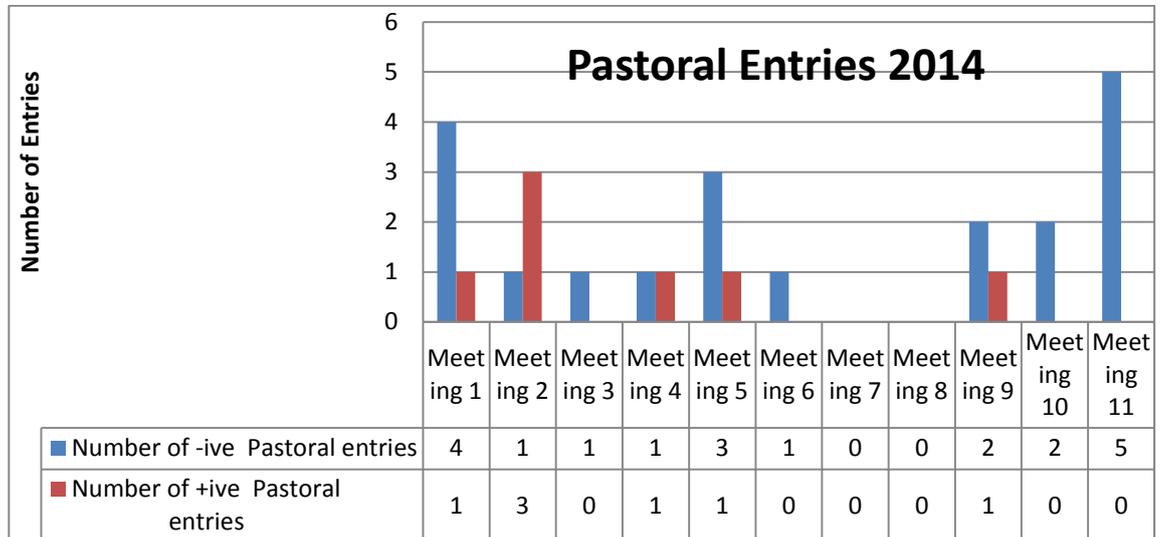


Pastoral Data 2014:

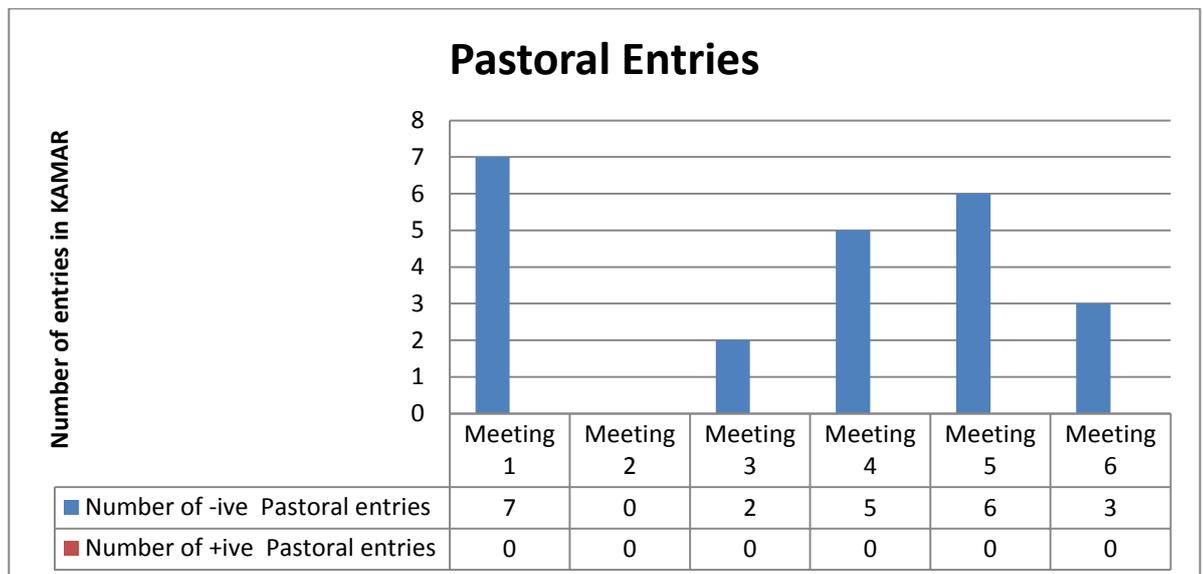
Pastoral data was collected on the student management system KAMAR. Teachers, Deans and Senior Leadership use the KAMAR system to make both positive and negative pastoral entries on individual students. If a student shows any unacceptable behaviour an entry is recorded in

KAMAR. Conversely if a student exhibits extremely positive behaviour this is also recorded within KAMAR. The following graphs show the number of pastoral entries for each student:

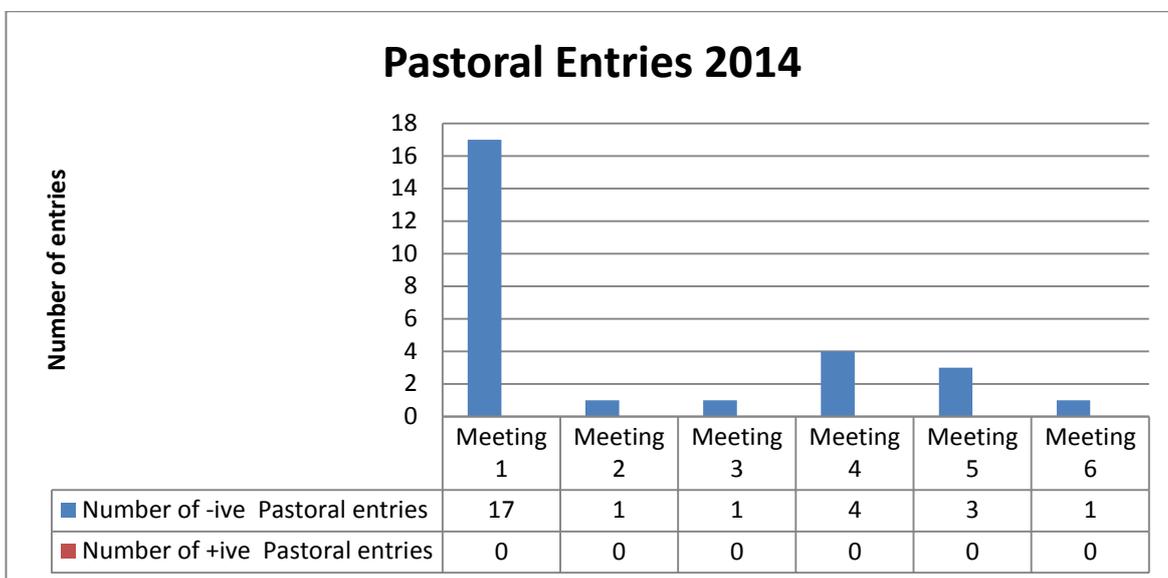
Sam



Rangi



Timoti



The following data show a selection of both positive and negative student behaviour entries that were made in KAMAR between circle meetings.

Pastoral Negative	Pastoral Positive
Unacceptable behaviour	Working well in English
Having a disrespectful attitude	Worked extremely hard on her class test Technology
Threatening another student	Positive in attitude in Dance class.
Bunking at another student's house	
At the shop during interval	
Wearing an incorrect jersey on two occasions	
Refusing to put phone away	

Academic Data 2014

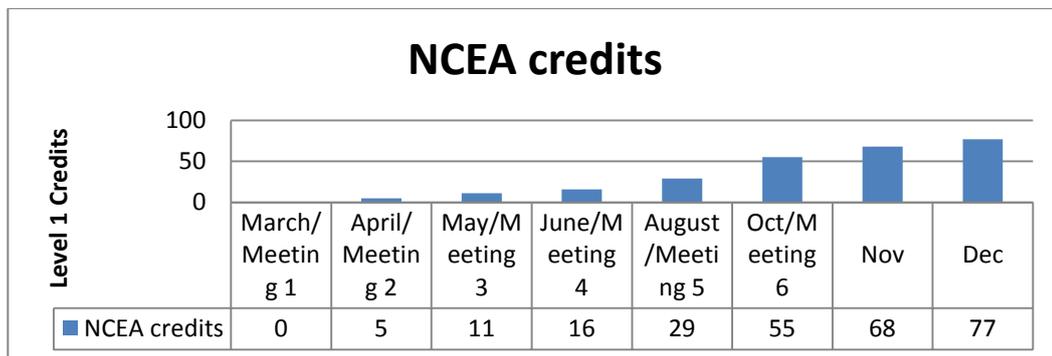
Sam

Sam	Beginning of 2014	End of 2014
asTTle Results Reading	3B	4B
asTTle Results Writing	2A	4A
asTTle Results Maths	3P	4P
Final JCEA Credits 2014		179/200

Sam's asTTle Reading and Maths result improved 1 whole level. Her asTTle Writing result improved by 2 levels.

Sam's final JCEA (Junior Certificate for Educational Achievement) award was the top available, a gold award, gaining 179 credits out of a possible 200.

Rangi



Timoti

Timoti	Beginning of 2014	End of 2014
asTTle Results Reading	Did not complete	4P
asTTle Results Writing	Did not complete	4A
asTTle Results Maths	3P	3P
Final JCEA Credits 2014		76 = no award

Overall Outcomes:

Attendance:

As discussed previously, one of the biggest influences of success at school is attendance. The attendance record of students, who are 'at risk' and who have been identified by Deans and the Truancy Officer at the school, are generally attending below 60%. The YDC placed around each 'at risk' student within the research, has been successful in maintaining a stable attendance level at around 80%. Whilst the attendance level was seen to fluctuate slightly through the year, the trend was generally in an upward direction.

Achievement:

Two of the three students completed a very successful academic year. One student earned 179 of a total of 200 possible junior graduation credits. The other student achieving at total of 77 NCEA Level 1 credits, after receiving an estimated final success rate of a total of 35 NCEA credits by her teachers at the end of Term 2. The third student remained at school in class for the year and received 79 out of a total of 200 possible credits.

Engagement:

All three students were engaged in both the learning culture of the school and in extracurricular activities offered throughout the YDC process.

Behaviour:

Once involved in the YDC none of the students received a stand down. There were still behaviour incidents being recorded within KAMAR, however they were at a much lower level than before involvement in the intervention.

Alongside the attendance, achievement and behaviour data collected over the year for each student, it was necessary to gather feedback from all participants around the experiences of the YDC process.

Evaluation of participants' experience

After the final YDC for 2014 all participants, including the students, whānau, teachers, Police representative and the volunteer social worker,

were interviewed individually. The transcripts were presented under the following headings:

- The benefits of setting up a YDC.
- Changes that occurred over the YDC intervention.
- Recommendations for improvements to the YDC intervention.
- Reflecting on the whole YDC experience.
- Advice for future participants.

The students were given a set of questions which were different to the whānau and community member's questions. The student questions centred more around the YDC and how it impacted on them and less about the process itself. Both sets of questions can be found in the appendices.

Benefits of setting up the YDC

Students were asked what were the good things about being in a YDC and the whānau and community members were asked what the benefits were of setting up the YDC around the student they were supporting. The students all had received multiple stand downs, however the reasons for the stand downs all varied, so benefits could be related to behaviour, academic success, attendance or relationship improvement to name a few and this needed a little explanation at the time of the interview.

“The help that was given to my child and myself from everyone that was involved. I saw a lot of ups and downs in the beginning but now really really good changes. Her/His attitude with their teachers and me at home has improved 10x” (Whānau member).

“Due to the goal setting s/he involved himself in sports again which was a good thing” (Whānau member).

“Most important is that it keeps the student engaged in education. The flow on effects will be seen in the future. We know that if they are engaged in education for longer they will have better opportunities in terms of employment and will reduce their risk of offending. We have seen that you can't focus solely on the youth and put them back into a whānau that is

struggling. The holistic approach where we look at the wellbeing of the whole whānau is key” (Police representative).

“The benefits I saw were the students’ engagement in school life. They felt a part of the school. Having a range of people within the circle meant that s/he was able to see you as leader of the school, me as a teacher of the school and the Police Person as well as people from the community as well as their own whānau and all those people meant that s/he was surrounded and you could see that s/he felt comfortable within the school because of that” (Teacher).

“Enormous benefit because the student otherwise wouldn’t be fitting in with the educational system the way it is as s/he was on their way out and besides they’re still here at school and doing really well” (Teacher).

“Provides accountability for student’s actions and behaviours, assisting in problem solving and decision making. Provides a place for students to express their feelings in a safe environment. Less discipline referrals and a rise in school attendance and mostly building positive and respectful relationships with staff, whānau and other stake holders” (Volunteer social worker).

“I could talk to everyone there about anything and I could trust everyone and it was good for me to stay out of trouble because of the meetings” (Student).

“All the support you get from the teachers who are around and all the positive energy” (Student).

From the researcher’s perspective these benefits were not always apparent or acknowledged, especially at the beginning of the process. The student and whānau members found the YDC very confronting initially due to previous negative experiences within the education system. If the interviews had taken place within the first two meetings the feedback could have looked quite different and the process possibly abandoned prematurely due to the stress that some whānau members were experiencing.

Changes that occurred over the YDC intervention

This question focused on changes that the circle members noticed over the year. These could be either physical change, such as in appearance or how they carry themselves, mental and emotional changes is how they feel, changes among friendship groups, relationships with teachers or family members or changes in work ethic and attitude or a combination of a few. These changes can be either positive or negative and could have been noticed at home, school or out socially. Example responses include:

“At the beginning s/he hated it and actually I hated it too to start off with. I didn’t want to come, I felt that I have to go to work, come here sort her out and it was a big toll on the other children as well. But coming was good for both of us, for me anyway” (Whānau member).

“Yes I saw many changes, very much so, more to the end of the process. The journey s/he went on with her/his friends and stuff and the crowd s/he was hanging with and then they sort of went and it got better and better as the months went on. The last hui was really awesome, all the good things that happened from the meeting. Things got more positive as the circle went on” (Whānau member).

“We have seen some great gains from the support we have given to the students. The school we look at the success with their education lens and will provide data on eg increase in attendance, increase in academic etc. However with an iwi lens we look at the overall positives where ‘whakawhanaungatanga’ is the glue that binds us together. Once the relationships with the young person and whānau are strong and they are the ones that are driving their change then we know that we have been successful” (Police Rep).

“The student feeling more comfortable within the school. I also noticed the goals and aspirations were more obvious and they were more ready to act upon them because of what had been discussed within the circles. So developing a student that is interested in where they go in terms of what they can do in school” (Teacher).

“I felt that because of the extra bit of positive relationship that s/he felt I was doing by attending the circles s/he just so wanted to please in class. S/he had her/his head down and by far the best in the class. S/he was the hardest worker and was never distracted and always wanted to please. I only ever saw really good things with the student, s/he was awesome” (Teacher).

“Overall student participation in school had increased. Empowered the student alternative options to unload to others-other than teaching staff. Increase in self-confidence and self-worth” (Volunteer social worker).

“Yep I never used to actually do my work and now I do. It helped a lot with relationships with teachers. Yes it had made it an alright place to be and I did better in my school work in the end” (Student).

““With teachers it made me get on better with them and sort out my problems. It made me focus better. It helped me get my credits. Made school feel like a better place. In the beginning, no, I hated it but by the end I was doing a lot better and it was good” (Student).

Recommendations for improvements to the YDC intervention

Providing support for both student and whānau was a key aspect of the YDC intervention. The question asked was how the YDC process could be improved to provide better outcomes for the student being supported. The students had a much simpler question that asked how the YDC could be made better. The responses were as follows:

“I actually think it was good how it was run in the end. I didn’t like it to start but in the end it became a good process for me and him. I don’t see any changes needed” (whānau member).

“Due to the majority of the students being Māori I think it’s important that we have kuia and kaumātua as part of the circles as part of the circles. They are an important resource in our community that have the ability to engage with the young person and whānau in a way that teachers and police staff cannot. It’s hard to describe but they have a calming presence and the ability to talk about whakapapa (genealogy) and tikanga

(customs and protocols of the community) that was so often lacking with the students that we were working with” (Police Rep).

“Everything that I saw was awesome and that s/he always looked forward to the feed afterwards and the little chats. I think it was great and s/he was building relationships with the police person and dad and would read out things to dad that s/he had written about him in class which was lovely and at times emotional. It was great” (Teacher).

“When a member of a circle is appointed a task to do, make sure that they follow through with it- keep everyone accountable for their own work/requirement including the student. Be consistent. When a goal is set or alternative solution generated ensure follow up is done and signed off” (Volunteer social worker).

“Nothing. I was happy with it. The meetings should be 2 weeks to start and if it’s good 4 weeks or something” (Student).

“Always have food. That’s pretty much it” (Student).

The overall responses indicated that the process was successful in its current form however there were some pertinent comments made by community members that will be useful to consider in the future. One of these was the importance of kai (food) at the meetings.

Reflecting on the whole YDC experience

When reflecting on the whole experience the intention was to try and get a sense of the feelings that were associated with being involved in the YDC. Due to some of the family members’ previous negative experiences of education and in particular their own personal schooling experiences there was always going to be some anxiety associated with coming in to school for the meetings on a regular basis. To ask participants now, in hindsight, what would have been helpful to know before they began the YDC process, was detail that could be helpful for future participants if the intervention is continued.

“It was just the fear of coming to school and hearing bad stuff” (whānau).

“I think being Māori and having a kaumātua there it is respectful and they can’t play up because Nan’s there and stuff” (whānau).

“No we have all been on this journey together and are learning as we go. That’s the thing with restorative circles is you don’t know what you are going to get and you have to be adaptable and go with the flow” (Police Rep).

“Knowing where it was going and the process. At the start of the year I didn’t quite understand that it was periodical and consistent and now I know that I can engage with the student more effectively” (Teacher).

“Know who you are working with...do not assume anything...go into the circle with an open mind...give a damn” (Volunteer social worker).

Advice for future participants

Participants were asked what they would like to tell someone who might be considering being a part of a YDC in the future. This question gave some participants the opportunity to share any other final comments about the whole experience.

“It is a good programme and just go with it I think” (whānau).

“Really to embrace it and accept it and want to be there and buy in. If you don’t buy in it is pointless on both sides. Buy in and make the most of it. We are lucky to have these opportunities because without these who knows what might happen” (whānau).

“Hop into these meetings with your kids. Give it a go” (whānau).

“I think if they are the student they need to persevere and realise that the group is not their enemy and that they are lucky you have the group. I would encourage them to be a part of it as for my child if s/he didn’t have this group and the path that s/he was going down, s/he may not be at this school anymore without this group. That’s honestly how I feel, that s/he was privileged to be a part of this group and with the people s/he had around her/him to awahi her/him was just so amazing. Everyone was straight up with her/him. There was honesty and it made her/him make her/him look at herself/himself and it opened my eyes to a lot of things as

half the things I couldn't believe were happening but they were happening so for me as a parent it was nice to know that I had support for myself as sometimes it's not there in the whānau and when you have a golden child and a mischief child then it's quite hard for whānau support so I really really appreciated this group around my child as if s/he didn't have the group s/he may not be here anymore so I am very thankful s/he had this group. Without the YDC s/he might not have had the opportunities to be successful" (whānau).

"Restorative circles are about moving whānau forward, I encourage them to be open minded and the journey is about them and not us" (Police Rep).

"My advice would be to talk to people who have been involved in one. I think the dad would have a lot of advice to give and a lot of support. I could tell them as much as I could but it would be far more effective coming from someone who has been there; a spokeswoman" (Teacher).

"Your voice is valued. It is a team effort and a shared responsibility...become part of the journey whether long or short. You are an important piece of the puzzle. Please do not give up on our kids...they need to know they belong and are valued members of our society as they are our future leaders. Participate in the well-being of the circle, look for the smallest strength in the student and try to help them see it and grow it" (Volunteer social worker).

The evaluative data was very encouraging and although the research was only around three students and their YDC, there were a total of twelve people interviewed. The Police Representative's comment about the benefits of a YDC is worth revisiting. S/he talks about 'whakawhanaungatanga' being the glue that binds us together and once the relationships with the young person and whānau are strong and they are the ones that are driving their change then we know that we have been successful. This comment emphasises the need for a collaborative approach. Student, whānau, school and community working together must be the key to keeping the difficult students at school and reduce suspensions and exclusions.

The feedback from all circle members also indicates that the introduction of the YDC intervention needs to be carefully considered. A suggestion was made by both teachers and whānau members that the inclusion of a mentor could reduce the initial anxiety of being part of the intervention. The whānau members of 'at risk' students, with large numbers of pastoral referrals, have generally had significant negative communication from the school that entire student's secondary school life. These circle members felt that the mentor would be useful to provide support through the initial stages particularly, which was reported to have been the most difficult time. This could be someone who has been through the YDC process before. The mentor would have valuable advice and guidance to any new circle members. If the perception from the students and families was that the YDC was a further opportunity for the school just to have another 'go at them', as reported by some of the circle members, then the intervention will not be successful. The student and their whānau also did not want to come to a meeting on a regular basis where the circle members just gave advice and offered solutions to their problems. They wanted an opportunity for everyone within the circle to explore what was happening for them by engaging in respectful questioning and particularly active listening. Once this was apparent, a conscious effort was made to ensure that all circle members were aware of how students and whānau members were feeling and the engagement by the student and whānau improved significantly as a result.

The comment from the teacher about being unsure of the whole process was noted. As the teacher was a casual member, less time was spent discussing the YDC intervention in depth. Just because they were a teacher at the school does not mean they automatically know about and understand the YDC process. The level of communication will need to be considered in future.

Overall Reflection on the Findings

This study has shown that the use of the modified YDC was successful in keeping three students at school that were potentially 'at risk' of suspension. The students not only completed the year at school without reoffending, they improved their attendance, engagement and

achievement. Once the student and whānau had a better understanding of what was happening within the YDC both parties relaxed and began to take advantage of the increased proactive problem solving opportunities the meetings provided. These included things such as checking on academic data, discussing poor relationships between the teacher and student and finding a way forward which in the past could have escalated into a stand down.

The setting and achievement of goals was a key to the success of the circle as it kept the focus on the positive achievements rather than reverting to a discussion about behaviour. There were times, as mentioned by the volunteer social worker above, that everyone was required to be part of supporting a goal to be achieved. It was important to make sure everyone followed through with the tasks set, including the student. To keep building a new identity and maintaining the momentum involving the positive change in behaviour, the circle members all needed to be working together to achieve the goals.

Chapter 6

The blend of the Waikato University Hui Whakatika, the Braithwaite YDC and the McElrea SSC was a successful framework from which to run the modified YDC's. The Youth Development Circle appears to be an ideal place to nurture the growth of a new identity; it provides a safe and supportive environment. The three individual case studies each reflected the results of a school's behaviour management plan that resisted the temptation to suspend students who did not fit into the current school culture. The school placed a community of care around the student and whānau to ensure the student was supported at school and was not just another school and community negative statistic. All three students are back at school in 2015 working at their chronological year level.

The MOE sets benchmarks for schools in terms of how they should respond to managing student behaviour. The process is a procedural process (stand down, suspension, exclusion) which is nationwide and "one size fits all". A school in a particular community needs to build a fit for purpose model of addressing student behaviour management that is relevant to their student population. It is reasonable to expect, where complex social issues affect the lives of students, the school will develop approaches to supporting their students that are tailored to meet the needs of the students and the community or environment that they operate within. Thus, a student living in a deprivation level 10 neighbourhood who attends a low decile school, in a town where reports to Police of family violence are 200% higher than the national average, will no doubt have a different developmental path than a student who is living in a deprivation 1 neighbourhood attending a decile 8 school.

The range of tools and responses that a low decile school will have in place to support their students will have to be fit for purpose in order to support students to achieve an acceptable level of development, both in terms of their educational learning and their social learning. Where violence is the norm within the home, the school has to invest more to teach the student that violence is not acceptable. And where attendance at

school is not valued by family, the school must teach the student that attendance is the key to successful education. The school has to invest more in the student's social learning. This is especially true when dealing with student behaviour. When a student breaks the school rules (and in some cases, the law), the school has an opportunity to teach social learning and offer options that address the complex barriers that a student has already had to overcome in order to attend school in the first place. These barriers include aspects such as a home environment where the norm includes poverty, violence, alcohol and other drugs.

In an area of high deprivation the YDC provides an opportunity for supported student social/emotional learning within an educational setting. Reinforced by past and present Youth Court Judges, keeping students at school involved in learning, remains a significant protective factor and one that needs to be pursued if at all possible.

Future Changes

The BOT and Leadership will decide if the intervention continues in its current form. If the YDC is to be a pathway within the school's behaviour management plan, now that eight YDC's have been run over the last eighteen months, a change will be recommended to allow for two pathways to trigger the Youth Development intervention: the first will be as a reactive strategy as we have done within this research, to ensure a student that is on the cusp of a suspension remains in education at the school.

The second pathway is a proactive strategy in which a YDC will be placed around a student at the beginning of their secondary school journey in response to information regarding their precarity that has been gathered from the contributing school. In this instance the circle will include a key staff member from the contributing school for the first few meetings until the student has successfully transitioned into the new school.

Once any student has a YDC placed around them, it is recommended that the intervention will continue for the student's life at school until s/he is transitioned into further tertiary education or into employment.

Costs of YDCs

There has been a large investment of time by myself, as the manager and facilitator of the project. The total amount of hours required to implement the YDC intervention for the three students was approximately 72 hours in total. This included the work required pre conference and follow up post conference. Organising times that suited all whānau members and community members for circle meetings were at times difficult. Generally when a day and time was agreed to by all members and set for the student, the meetings were routinely held at that time for the year. In a school situation this does mean that the Deputy Principal operating YDC's within the school will be available less during the day to cover other jobs within a portfolio, and the benefits will need to be balanced against the cost of resources. The cost of food is minimal compared to the human resource cost of the facilitator for the school. The food can be as simple as tea and toast if it is a breakfast meeting and pizza if the meeting is held in the afternoon.

In a low socio economic isolated community such as ours, education is really the only way out of the deprivation cycle. The value of education, when it is not modelled at home, needs to be explicitly taught within the circle. This requires a change in culture for each of these young people and culture change takes time, hence the recommendation that the intervention continue for the student's secondary school life. The circle is also a structured opportunity for the school to engage with the whānau of the student and to demonstrate care for them as well.

Further Implications of YDC application

When I embarked on this project I was particularly naïve with regards to the intricacies and complex nature of the power of relationships, and in particular the power of speaking. I had always believed that students would learn best from someone with whom they had a 'good' relationship.

Therefore my philosophy around the YDC's was fundamentally to reflect just that, establishing strong and supportive relationships with members in all circles. I believed that if I formed these robust relationships with all circle members as a facilitator, then I would be able to influence and manage the relationships between all the members sitting around the table and ultimately over time we would be able to modify the student's behaviour together. The research showed that there were many more dynamics and complexities involved within the process than previously understood, from family relationship breakdowns at home and student/teacher issues in class or in the playground, to sharing the intervention with all staff, leadership and BOT.

Choosing the right facilitator to lead the introduction is imperative. The person facilitating the YDC must have excellent relationship building and facilitation skills, and they must have a clear understanding of the intent and purpose of the intervention.

The facilitator's art of questioning and stance of respectful curiosity was found to be necessary. This was clearly evident within the YDCs and can be witnessed by the Dad's comment about the school "being nosey and butting into his family issues", a place that in his world was incredibly private. The importance of allowing the student and whānau to re-story are pivotal in the success of a YDC. This process was totally dependent on the skill of the facilitator.

The way of speaking does matter. To speak respectfully does not take any more time or effort in crafting the words; what it takes, is a conscious effort to think about what is being said in an agentic and discursive way and losing the negative and judgemental stance. It is more about respectful forms of questioning and less about condescending statements judging the person. If a circle member, particularly a community member, is unable to speak in this way then they need to be asked to leave the circle intervention as the student will never feel safe enough to grow a new identity in their presence.

Once the decision has been made to use the YDC intervention and the 'right' facilitator chosen to lead the intervention, the next step is setting up

the intervention. The feedback from all participants was that this needs to be done carefully and inclusively as many families with 'at risk' students are already feeling vulnerable and powerless. The support of a mentor for the student and family could be a strategy used in the future to reduce the initial anxiety of attendance at the circle meetings which was expressed by participants. It became evident during the research that the success of a YDC was very dependent on the support and 'buy in' of family so the introduction and confidence in the process and the facilitator cannot be underestimated.

Choosing the core and casual members, to attend the meetings was an important feature of the process. The student must select the core members that she would like to attend the meetings to support her. There must also be at least one family member selected as a core member. Teachers involved in the YDCs need to believe in the restorative culture. The benefit of the YDC is that that they work in such a way that the student selects the teachers to be involved, so they will undoubtedly select teachers who they have a positive relationship with or at least one that will see them as being successful one day. Inevitably the YDC process itself will eliminate those teachers who are not able to work within the restorative culture and who would prefer to throw the student out of school rather than commit to a lengthy, time consuming process of meetings, during their professional time, with whānau and community.

The inclusion of the volunteer social worker as a core member made a significant difference to the support available for the student at school between the circle meetings. This person was able to regularly check on the student, be proactive and solution focussed with any issues that might have been developing. She was a significant adult who made herself available whenever she was required by the students and whānau. This success has led to the school employing the volunteer on a part time basis.

Positive community connections were imperative, particularly the relationship with the NZ Police. The Police person working closely within the circle, as a core member, and representative of a wider community network was very powerful. The members of the YDC looked up to this

person and respected their views and opinions just because of the mana held within the community. S/he was also able to speak from a more objective, and less emotional perspective, and it appeared that s/he was able to hold the student and whānau accountable by simply wearing a uniform. As the Police representative worked within the local community in which the student lived and had the ability to watch and track the student after school hours and during the weekends the respect in which s/he was held was noticeable.

Due to the majority of the students being Māori it was important that we had a kuia or kaumātua as part of the circles. They are an important resource in our community that have the ability to engage with the young person and whānau in a way that teachers and police staff cannot. The kuia more often than not had personal contacts with the wider whānau which improved the connections and support available for the whānau and the school.

The inclusion of the casual members was less important as they were able to come when required to support the student and then go when their 'job' was done. The circle members would recommend the inclusion of a casual member if the student needed specific specialised support such as a maths tutor or a form teacher.

Prerequisites

If a school was to consider the introduction of the YDC, there are some key aspects that need to be addressed before embarking on the intervention. The first one would be that the school leadership and BOT must be supportive of the intervention. The YDC intervention is resource hungry in terms of time and human resources. Braithwaite (2003) states that the cost of the YDC intervention is high and this cost would fall on the circle members who gave up their time to the meetings, and on the mentors (such as teachers, Police and volunteer social worker) who give up their time to mentor the students and their families. Hopkins (2004) goes so far as to say that for real and sustainable change to occur both time and resources must be allocated to restorative projects and, however willing a school is to commit to change, realistic support from leadership is

imperative. This intervention required a high level of commitment both by the school and myself as a Deputy Principal. The total time invested personally in these three YDC's was approximately 72 hours. For each one hour meeting there was at least one hour preparation and one hour follow up. The time involved in canvassing community members such as NZ Police, local kaumātua, teachers and the social worker will only be during the initial setting up process and once this is set up it will only be a matter of replacing members when necessary. The majority of the work surrounding the YDC, including gathering data, confirming meeting times and checking on families, occurred outside the school day and thus the impact on the day to day job as the DP running the intervention was small. This time cost factor also needs to be balanced with the possible cost to the community of the young people involved in wider criminal activity, and the time given by school personnel should be balanced against the time required to manage a recalcitrant student when there is no YDC process in the school.

Conclusion

Although it would be good to trial the YDC in a range of schools (for example urban/rural, co-educational/single sex, large/small) there is probably enough initial data from this study to show that YDC's can improve a student's engagement with school and reduce recourse that schools have to suspensions and exclusions.

It has to be said that some radical changes are needed to ensure inter-sectorial communication. Teachers have always known that within our bureaucratic system Child, Youth and Family (CYFS), Police, schools and voluntary organisations do not always communicate well. YDC is a way of ensuring that such communication can happen. YDC is a change of practice around issues but it is also a "change of heart". Without compassion, a firm sense of justice, a desire for social justice and equity these circles could not operate. YDC could provide a way of reforming the "red neck" teacher who is punitive and sceptical. People can and do change in these meetings. It is a "seeing is believing" event. Police

personnel will also modify their stance on issues. The YDC must not be dependent on getting a “nice” Policeperson.

There is a way which government policy could assist schools. Imagine a new Education Act which adds YDCs must be trialled before a suspension is triggered. There could be a case study of 30 secondary schools and 10 primary schools before the new policy comes in but it would be a way of ensuring some funding for the time, effort and use of school personnel that YDC demands. With restorative practice now well established in our Youth Courts this practice should be trialled and supported in schools. Currently there are a number of New Zealand schools who are au fait with restorative practice. Some schools provide restorative training for Deans and senior staff but the practice does not go through to the higher levels of discipline. The schools that are decile 1-3 could be given social worker time to co-ordinate all of this in consultation with the appropriate senior leader.

The case studies covered here did show that whānau want to engage with schools. They do want to be invited and personnel do come in when asked. They shared ideas readily in this non-threatening “circle-process”. The people involved found out a lot about each other. The teachers, police staff and social workers became more real to the participants and some teachers involved underwent a real epiphany experience, for example they said things like “I didn’t know that X was sleeping on the garage floor” and “I didn’t know that Y had lived with a nana since the age of 6 months”. The inclusive nature of the YDC forces us all to change. There is a belief in a redemptive process that is powerful whatever cultural background people have. There is, through narrative therapy, a value placed on individuals’ very intimate histories. They have their own stories to tell and their stories have the power to change both them and us. As Edith Freeman (2011) has pointed out, we can help our students expand their narratives. We can help them put them into context and understand them. Our society has not encouraged the valuing of narratives for people on the margins of society. In the YDC we have to be involved. We have to be good listeners. We have to admit to being a part of the circle and the process: not a tribunal handing down something from on high.

Youth Development Circles are a way of celebrating individuality. They are a way of being more respectful of culture especially where Māori people are concerned. YDC are more in the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi than the system we currently have, which is reactive and punitive. I would like to see a study that widens out to include more schools trialling YDC. Is it different for younger students (Primary school)? Can it be used in all sectors? Can we better train people in narrative therapy approaches? Even if YDC only raises issues for teachers, we have at least moved people along a line from reactive to proactive and productive. To teach teachers to celebrate the narratives of deeply disadvantaged individuals is the real 'value added' for this process. A narrative therapeutic approach is a powerful tool and is used to great advantage in YDC. Young people are being given a powerful tool to look at their own story and make sense of it. YDC make whānau equal and collaborative partners. They are not to be talked at or 'diagnosed'- they are being asked to participate. This is an empowering process which is most suitable in a small democracy that claims to value good relationships within all sectors of society. Indigenous communities around the world have spoken of how their history is undervalued. We have heard the same from women, and working class people's stories have only recently been valued.

There is a strong Māori tradition that values "new shoots". This metaphor of growth and development is very acceptable in Māori society and can be seen in whakataukī -one of which I will end with. Sir Apirana Ngata said-

E tipu, e rea, Mo ngā ra o tōu ao

The rub he uses is to GROW.

"Grow up and thrive for the days destined to you....."

It is his most famous quotation and the metaphor is of a plant. Our students are our plants and a very fine way of tending them would be to use the YDC, as these encourage growth.

Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai te iwi

With your basket and my basket the people will live

This metaphor is very appropriate to describe the YDC. In this case what we shared is not food, but our stories and our lives and how they coalesce and develop.

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Appendix 1: Invitation to participate in a research project

17th June 2014

Dear

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project about the Youth Development Circle that you are involved in at the moment at school.

My research is for my Master of Education degree. It is trying to find out if the Circle that has been placed around you is making a difference to how well you are doing at school. I am hoping that it will give us information about how the circles are going, and maybe help to improve them.

I would like to look at your attendance and behaviour information we have at school and also how well you are doing in your classes. At the end I would also like to talk with you about your experience of the circle. After that I will write a report that could be read by lots of other people. Your name and details will not be given in anything I write. It is important to note that I will do everything I can to disguise your identity, but still, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. After the interview I will show it to you so you can check that you are happy about what you said. At the end you can read the report, a copy will be available at the school. It will also be available through the University of Waikato Research Commons database, which means it can be read by other scholars.

The research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, to make sure it is all okay. My supervisor is Dr Wendy Drewery. I will come and see you in the next few days to answer any questions you might have and see if you are happy to be part of this research. It is important that you know that if you do not want to be part of the research that is okay and you will still be fully looked after in your circle.

Yours sincerely

Bindy Hannah

Appendix 2: Student Consent Form

I _____ consent to being part of the research project on Youth Development Circles, by Bindy Hannah titled: **Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial**

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage and I have the right to withdraw my data up until I have seen the transcript of the evaluative interview, which will ask about how being part of the Circle was for me.

I understand that I will be able to read the findings of the research and that the research will not use my name and my identity will be protected.

I understand that anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

I consent to the data gathered about me, which could include attendance, achievement and engagement information, analysis of circle meeting minutes and evaluative interview transcripts, being used in the research for Bindy Hannah's research project and any presentations or publications if they arise.

I consent to participate in this study.

Student's Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date _____

Appendix 3: Circle Member Information Letter

17th June 2014

Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial

Dear

My name is Bindy Hannah. I am a Deputy Principal at _____.
I am currently beginning a three paper thesis through the University of Waikato towards my Masters of Education. I am researching the topic stated above and working under the supervision of Dr Wendy Drewery in the Faculty of Education.

My research is based around evaluating the educational outcomes for students at _____ who have a Youth Development Circle around them. I am currently approaching members of [the student's] community of care who are currently involved in a Youth Development Circle to invite them to participate in my research. I would like to make it very clear that you should not feel obliged to be part of the research and it is totally voluntary.

I would be asking your permission to use the minutes of the circle meetings that you attend in my research and for you to take part in an evaluative interview about the circle outcomes before the end of 2014.

At the conclusion of the year, after the final community circle, I will write a report describing my findings. When I have the transcript of the evaluation interview I will offer you an opportunity to read it and make any comments. At this time you will be able to ask for corrections or changes to be made. The report will not include any names and care will be taken to ensure that you are not identifiable. In spite of this, though, I should say that it is not possible to completely guarantee anonymity.

You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any time up until you have seen the transcript of the evaluation. To withdraw from the research please, email or see at school _____ at _____ or phone _____

At the end of the research a final report will be made available at the school for participants to look at. A copy of the thesis will be lodged in the University Research Commons, which means it will be available for other scholars to read.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me on: _____ or by email at _____. If you have any concerns with the process undertaken, please contact my university supervisor Wendy Drewery at the address given in the letterhead.

I will make contact with you shortly to see if you are happy to be part of this research. If you do not want to participate, I will not question your decision. If you are willing, I will ask you to sign the consent form attached.

Yours sincerely,

Bindy Hannah

Appendix 3A: Circle Member Consent form

Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial

I consent to the undertaking of the above named research at _____. I understand that the research will involve the analysis of KAMAR data about selected students, the minutes of the circle meetings, and an evaluative interview with me as a participant in the circles at the end of the year. This project has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and Bindy Hannah has outlined measures she will take to undertake this research in an ethical and professional manner.

The findings of the research will be presented as a Master of Education thesis. I understand the data gathered for this research will be used for presentations and publications, and that under no circumstance will names, identities or any personal details be shared with anyone else.

I give consent with the understanding that:

- 1. All material that could reveal my identity will be written in a way that will preserve anonymity for the school and the participants as far as possible.*
- 2. I understand that although every effort will be made, it is not possible to ensure complete anonymity.*
- 3. I understand that I will see the interview transcript, and that I can change anything I am not happy with at that time. After that I understand that I cannot withdraw from the study.*
- 4. All data (recordings, transcripts, journals and observations) will be held securely by Bindy Hannah for five years as stated in University of Waikato regulations.*
- 5. The data gathered will be used for research reports, seminars and publications suitable for teachers, schools and community, as well as academic conference presentations, articles, chapters and books.*

Participant Name : _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 4: Youth Development Circle Information

A Youth Development Circle

A Youth Development Circle is an intervention which involves placing a support structure around a student to ensure the student achieves the best educational outcomes possible. The circle will comprise of both core and casual members. Core members of the circle, chosen by the student, could be at least one member of their whānau, the form teacher or a member of the teaching staff, a police person, a member of their iwi and the Deputy Principal. These members will be asked to make a commitment to the intervention and try to attend all circle meetings. The casual members may include a sports coach, boyfriend, a friend or anyone that they trust. These members might come and go depending on what is happening currently in the young person's life. This circle will meet fortnightly to start with to work proactively with the student working through a reflection of the problem(s), seeking new shoots to focus on, setting short and long term goals and providing a community of care. The time between circle meetings can increase once the student becomes more settled. The intention is that these circle meetings will occur out of the student's timetabled school life to minimise loss of learning time and where possible will be held at the Whare Mātauranga on Stanley Rd.

The initial circle will take the following form:

1. Open with karakia (Kaumātua, if in attendance will be invited to open otherwise the opportunity will be opened to the group).
2. Telling the story and naming and mapping the effects of the problem.
3. Seeking new shoots and mapping them.
4. Forming the plan and goals assigned to circle members to take responsibility for.
5. Set the review date.
6. The ending and closing with karakia
7. Hakari/afternoon tea

The following circles will take the following form:

1. Open with karakia (Kaumātua, if in attendance will be invited to open otherwise the opportunity will be opened to the group).
2. Introduction of any new members.
3. Reading goals from last meeting.
4. Student summaries the achievement or not of the goals.
5. Each circle member contributes the positive stories and or issues since the last meeting.
6. Student has the opportunity to respond.
7. Co constructed setting of new goals.
8. Set the review date.
9. Hakari
10. Circle members return and student reads out new goals.
11. The ending and closing with karakia.

If a student gets in to trouble and an urgent circle is called this will follow the procedure of the initial circle.

The expectations of students, core members and casual members involved in the circle:

- To be actively involved in the conversations and process
- To contribute where possible to each aspect of the circle
- To accept responsibility for their part in the goal setting and seek help where required
- To follow up areas that they have taken responsibility for
- To work together to ensure the best educational outcomes are achieved

Appendix 5: Principal Consent form

Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial

I consent to the undertaking of the above named research at _____.

I understand that the research will involve the analysis of KAMAR data about selected students, the minutes of the circle meetings, and evaluative meetings with participants in the circles. This project has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and Bindy Hannah has outlined measures she will take to undertake this research in an ethical and professional manner.

The findings of the research will be presented as a Master of Education thesis. I understand the data gathered for this research will be used for presentations and publications, and that under no circumstance will names, identities or any personal details be shared with anyone else. Notwithstanding these efforts, complete anonymity for the school and the circle members cannot be guaranteed.

I/We give consent with the understanding that:

1. *All material that could reveal the school's identity will be written in a way that will preserve anonymity for the school and the participants as far as possible.*
2. *I understand that although every effort will be made, it is not possible to ensure complete anonymity.*
3. *All data (recordings, transcripts, journals and observations) will be held securely by Bindy Hannah for five years as stated in University of Waikato regulations.*
4. *The data gathered will only be used for research reports, seminars and publications suitable for teachers, schools and community, as well as academic conference presentations, articles, chapters and books.*

I/We consent for the research to be supported by the school.

Principal : _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 6: Evaluation Interview Schedule – Student Participant

Title of Project:

Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial

Research question: Does the use of Youth Development Circles around at risk students improve educational outcomes?

1. What were the good things about being part of your youth development circle?
2. What was bad about being part of the circle?
3. What should we change if we keep doing this with other girls?
4. Did you know why you were involved in a Circle? Did being involved in the circle help you in a way you wanted?
5. Has being part of this circle made any difference to how you get on with other people in the school? Has it helped you do better in your school work? In what way?
6. Has being part of the circle made any difference to how you feel about and behave at school?

Appendix 6A: Evaluative Interview Schedule – Community Participant

Title of Project:

Youth Development Circles: A Report on a School Trial

Research question: Does the use of Youth Development Circles around at risk students improve educational outcomes?

1. What benefits did you see from setting up a youth development circle around the student you were supporting?
2. Did you see any changes in the student you were supporting as a result of being a part of a Youth Development Circle?
3. Would you like to make any suggestions about how the circle process could be improved to provide better outcomes for the student you were supporting?
4. Now you have completed the year in the circle, is there anything that you know now that would have been helpful if you had known it from the outset?
5. What advice do you have to give to other community and whanau members who have been invited to be part of a community circle?