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**Community influences on rural youth wellbeing:**

**Young people's perspectives**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Masters of Applied Psychology (Community)**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2016

## **Abstract**

This study considered rural young people's perceptions of community factors involved in their wellbeing. Two regional Waikato towns, Te Aroha and Otorohanga were used as the sites for the research project. Four focus groups were conducted with students in their final year of senior school to obtain qualitative data. The focus group participants were recruited via flyers placed in the two schools and there were two groups (one male and one female) from each college. Five further in-depth interviews and two less formal discussions with community members from these towns were used as additional information. The data was considered from a social constructivist perspective. Both towns provide opportunities for the members of the communities to come together which may engender a sense of community. Te Aroha and Otorohanga's students find that community-level events and, in particular, sport provides a good chance to meet with other sectors of the community. These social processes provide opportunities where there may be some implicit endorsement of the adolescents which may enhance self-esteem and, in turn, sense of wellbeing. The key findings are that sense of community cannot be the factor that directly determines wellbeing. The study provided evidence to suggest that sense of community can encourage social capital which is likely to have a positive correlation with wellbeing. Social capital is the "commodity" which can be accumulated by these community driven opportunities for interaction.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to say an enormous thank you for my supervisors Dr Cate Curtis and Dr Bill Cochrane for their guidance. It has meant so much to me to have their expertise and, because of this and their encouragement, has given me the chance to really enjoy the process of the research project. No matter how small (or large!) the query, Cate and Bill gave me help right away and this help was incredibly reassuring.

It was an absolute pleasure meeting the students who participated in the study. They were, without exception, interesting, interested, fun and so, thank you very much indeed for your time and your insights. I hoped to avoid any disruption to the school day, but I would particularly like to record my appreciation for the principals, deputy principal and counsellor of Te Aroha and Otorohanga Colleges. I know how busy they are and yet they were so generous with their time and guidance. Without their agreement, this project would have had to take a different approach but by assenting to it, gave me to the most opportunity to learn the opinions of my focus age group.

The community members who were interviewed for this project gave their time without reservation and provided valuable background and supporting information. Some of the community members chose to remain anonymous but I may name Anne Laws, Ricky Mateara and Mapuna Turner. Thank you to you and all those others whose names I may not record. It was really lovely to meet them all and make connection and, not only did I appreciate the information, but I have to say it is wonderful that people are so willing to give so much of themselves for the community (my words, not theirs! – they were, without exception, modest regarding their contribution).

Two other university staff members, I would particularly like to thank are Joy Fellows for all her help and Jillene Bydder to guiding me to the correct format of the final document.

My friends and work colleagues have been unstinting in their encouragement and help. Thank you to my then-manager, Clare, for allowing me to work flexibly to fit in the interviews and focus groups and to Felicity and Dave for believing in me so that I can even attempt the project. Bruce thank you for your guidance at the beginning of the project. To Lou and Irene thanks for being able to assist me from a cultural perspective, Kay for your concept insight, and Terence and Kate for your enthusiasm for the topic and Sue, Leanne and Kevin for accepting that I have been an absent friend sometimes! My friend, Yvonne in Malawi, thanks for skyping, emailing and communicating however, to make sure I was keeping up the momentum! And finally, Peter, for making just about every meal over the last 15 months, accepting that every weekend and many evenings, I am doing my project rather than being part of the family. It was selfless of him and I am very grateful.

Thank you to you all.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Adolescence can be a challenging time for young people. Not only are they going through many changes, it is also a time to start exploring independence. The young people will be exposed to new and exciting, and sometimes risky, experiences. During these years adolescents will, to varying degrees, be engaged in their family life, their school life and the community in which they live. Towards the end of most young people's adolescence, they may begin the transition from school to further training and/or paid employment.

The main purpose of this study is to explore rural young people's perceptions of community factors involved in their wellbeing.

### **Background**

A quick search of the words "youth" and "behaviour" on the internet results in lists of websites about behaviour associated with risk-taking, underage alcohol abuse, depression, sedentary lifestyles and the need for youth to address their failings. The term anti-social behaviour is often most associated with young people (Millie, Jacobson, McDonald, & Hough, 2008), and France and Meredith (2009) explain that youth can be disrespected as a result of the public's perception of youth behaviour.

Certainly adolescence can be a testing time for some young people and youth are over-represented in many negative statistics. The youth rates of unemployment (O'Connor, 2015), alcohol abuse (Correia, Murphy, & Barnett, 2012) including binge drinking (Charles, Valenti, & Miller, 2011) and the use of illicit drugs (Ministry of Health, 2010) are higher than the adult population. Crime statistics show that young people in the age range 17 to 24 years are

responsible for the highest percentage of convictions in the adult courts (Ministry of Justice Government of New Zealand, 2015). Adolescent self-harm and suicides are a serious public health issue (Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012) with youth being amongst the highest groups affected (Curtis, Curtis, & Fleet, 2013).

Adolescence is a time of great change and can include emotional turmoil, rebellion and behavioural experimentation (Kohli, Malik, & Mamta, 2013). Schulz and Kerig (2012a) cite Erikson's work (1950) on developmental stages that this period is when a person tries to develop their sense of identity. This will involve a lot of introspection as the adolescent works out, amongst other defining factors, how they want to be perceived and try to get a sense of their values. This process is unlikely to be a smooth progression. The young person tends to strive for more independence, and may begin to challenge, say, parental authority (Schulz & Kerig, 2012b). The teenager may be faced for the first time with a world that seems to not be "guaranteed with certainty" (Kohli et al., 2013, p148).

Major milestones will be required to be gained whilst the adolescent is experiencing all the biological changes that occur during puberty and the psychological changes that occur during adolescence. Most adolescents will be expected to gain some degree of academic success; their friends take on more of an influencing role whilst that of their family tends to diminish (Frydenberg, 2008) in some cultures; they are likely to seek out a partner (Way & Silverman, 2012), and may be exposed to many difficult experiences. Bullying is one of those challenges (Frydenberg, 2008), sexual experimentation and its associated risks is another (Schulman, Scharf, & Shacar-Shapira, 2012) and then there will

be, towards the end of adolescence, the preparation for adulthood and paid employment.

This period of significant change is also an exciting time and good experience for most young people (Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009). There are many factors, such as the adolescent's disposition, characteristics and behaviour that will affect the ease with which they manage this period in their lives. If the young person is well engaged with family, friends and their school, there is a strong chance that they will make the transition to functioning adulthood smoothly and successfully (Marsh, McGee, & Williams, 2014; Small & Memmo, 2004). If an adolescent has a sense of wellbeing – they usually feel they are well able both mentally and physically to cope with their lives – this will help them achieve good outcomes (Waters et al., 2009).

A factor that is positively correlated with an adolescent's wellbeing and development (Giannakopoulos et al., 2009) is the quality of family life. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the structure of the 'ideal' family but what is important is that both the parent or parents and the adolescent maintain a relationship throughout the adolescent period (Schulz & Kerig, 2012b).

Socio-economic status also has an influence on how a young person transitions through adolescence. This factor may have many confounders though. For example parental educational attainment, a lack of resources and social connections (social capital) and parental ability to provide financial support through their child's training period (Coleman & Hagell, 2007) may affect the adolescent's ability to make the transition smoothly. There will be some other factors such as parental conflict or divorce that will have a reinforcing effect as

not only does family separation threaten wellbeing, it is associated with financial loss (Martin, 2013).

Daniel and Wassell (2002) explain that, whatever the source of disruption to an adolescent's life, there are fundamentals that will help to minimise the effects of this damage and will help the young person to cope. These important factors are a sense of belonging, good self-esteem, and a feeling of control or efficacy. Another influence on adolescents' wellbeing may be the community in which they live.

The word 'community' suggests social cohesion but the construct includes many factors. This term incorporates the residents of a geographical space and the bonds that link those residents (Poggi & Sciortino, 2008), emotional connection (Day, 2006), sense of belonging (Amit, 2002), aspects of social and self-identity (Bateman, 2002) and the social processes of interaction and connection (Hodgetts, Otilie, Nikora, & Curtis, 2010). The measure of the strength of the community's interactions and emotional ties is sense of community.

Although adolescence is also a time for often developing romantic relationships, this is outside of the scope of this study. The reason why this has been excluded is because the study is considering the factors arising from the community in general within the town and not individual friendships. The psychosocial factors that will be considered in relation to wellbeing are sense of community, the school community, sport, resilience, factors that provide constancy or continuity and social capital.

One of the other factors that is likely to affect wellbeing is having a sense of what the future has in store. Until around the 1980s, plentiful apprenticeship schemes meant that young people were assured of work and even allowed for career opportunities within the public sector (Dalziel, 2013). During the 1980s and 90s, major ideological changes took place as neoliberalism was embraced by New Zealand Governments. Public spending was dramatically cut and, in some cases, government departments were expected to make profits (King, 2003). Public sector apprenticeships or “protected pathways for youth employment” (Dalziel, 2013, p.190) were discontinued while at the same time unemployment rates started to rise sharply. The job losses were particularly strongly felt in the smaller rural towns “tearing the heart out of small communities by post office closures and loss of forestry jobs, for example” (King, 2003, p.491).

Thirty years on, there is less demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labour than in previous generations. Industries that have employed this part of the workforce have tended to move offshore to countries where cheaper labour is freely available (Rashbrooke, 2013a) and technological changes have displaced manual workers or resulted in a higher level of skill necessary to be employed (Dalziel, 2013). Students in New Zealand have the choice of leaving school at 16 years old but are unlikely to have bankable skills by this stage. Nevertheless, New Zealand has received recognition for its innovative schemes which facilitate career training (such as Bibbee, 2013). Dalziel (2013) outlines the Youth Guarantee scheme which offers pathways into five areas of occupation through a vocational programme. Through this programme, if the school students achieve a pre-requisite level of education, they are eligible to progress into employment where further training can take place. Students who remain in school can gain

National Certificate Educational Attainment Level 3 which is the standard required for school leaver university entrance.

### **Key themes of the research topic – sense of community and wellbeing**

A review of the literature about “sense of community” has revealed that the term is common in everyday life and discourse but it is extremely difficult to identify what comprises the construct. The term was relegated to having a non-scientific basis but as the term was still regarded as a construct that had some merit, particularly in the shift to urban living, Sarason (1974) persevered and managed to develop a model for sense of community. The definitions that have been developed incorporate a variety of domains – geographical, emotional, cognitive and even behavioural aspects. The term can evoke a “feeling” of a slightly old-fashioned way of life.

As will be discussed, several themes have commonalities and overlaps. For example, sense of community requires a level of trust by the inhabitants of the society. Trust is also required for a sense of wellbeing. Wellbeing is the physical and emotional state that can encapsulate a range of factors that will allow a person to feel able to cope with most challenges and have a confidence and enjoyment of living. The person will feel generally secure in themselves, their surroundings and their usual life experiences and even the ability to stay on a task.

### **Research aim**

The primary research question in this project is to explore rural young people’s perceptions of community factors involved in their wellbeing.

### **Sites of the research**

Two towns, Otorohanga and Te Aroha, were selected as the sites for the research project. When I first came to New Zealand nine years ago, Otorohanga

caught my attention. I noticed that it was in the news for all the right reasons. Several articles explained that there was no unemployment, no young people hanging around and no graffiti, and some more recent statistics demonstrate other positive social indicators. For example, Otorohanga *District* had the lowest percentage of teenage mothers out of the entire Waikato region (Kaipuke Consultants, 2012). Trips through the town with the profusion of colourful plants in their hanging baskets dotted along the main street, announce that its residents and business owners take pride in the town's presentation. This location was selected on the fact that it appears to be functioning well. A comparison site also needed to be selected.

Te Aroha seemed like the obvious choice. Again as a new immigrant, I was drawn by its magnificent backdrop, Te Aroha Mountain, covered in regenerated plant life and with so many reminders and relics of its gold, copper, lead and zinc mining past. Then there is the town centre with its wide streets, war memorial and clock tower and further along, the elegance of Edwardian architecture, the hot pools amidst the trees and the mineral baths. Again, the district has some positive social indicators in relation to the Waikato region as a whole (Kaipuke Consultants, 2012) and there has been recent remedial work on the mountain to stabilise parts of it and to remove toxins caused by the mining (Waikato Regional Council, 2013).

The main criteria for the comparison site were the obvious similarities between the two towns. They are approximately the same distance from Hamilton (and so have comparable urban influence), there is only one high school with a similar size of school roll and there were no well-publicised issues in the town.

There were distinct differences too – Te Aroha has a lower percentage of Māori pupils than the national distribution whereas Otorohanga College's is higher and Te Aroha has several companies that have seasonally employed staff whereas Otorohanga has more permanent-staff employers.

### **Thesis Overview**

This masters thesis presents the stages of the data collection in this research project to learn more about the rural young people's perceptions of the factors within their community which are likely to have an influence on their sense of wellbeing.

Chapter Two provides a literature review of international and New Zealand based research on the key themes of sense of community, constancy and certainty, school community, wellbeing, social capital, sport, psychological theory and neoliberalism.

The method used to conduct the research is explained in Chapter Three. The chapter presents the primary and secondary sources of information and justification for why this method was employed. The main participants in this project were school students and as all human research requires, their safety was paramount. The ethics processes are presented in this chapter. Chapter Four provides an overview of Otorohanga and Te Aroha, including the sizes of their populations by ethnicity and by age, and the location of each town in relation to nearby centres and Hamilton which is the nearest major urban centre for both. The overviews include who are the major employers and provides a brief summary of the reasons why both towns attract tourists.

Chapter Five presents the findings and discussion. The findings, such as the students' opinions and information gathered through interviews with members of the communities, are considered in relation to the existing academic literature.

The conclusion of the research project is presented in Chapter Six. The limitations of the study are listed and recommendations offered as the final section of this thesis.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

Several key themes are particularly relevant to the understanding of what community factors are likely to have a bearing on an adolescent's wellbeing. These are constancy, certainty and stability in an adolescent's environment (Watts, Kumar, Nicholson, & Kumar, 2006), the adolescent's current school community (Marsh et al., 2014), the psychology affecting youth during this period (Bottrell, 2007; Frydenberg, 2008), social capital (Bottrell, 2009a) and the current political framework that may influence adolescents as they consider their future careers (Dalziel, 2013).

Chapter Two presents a review of international and New Zealand based literature on these key themes and the related topics. Most of the themes are related directly to adolescence but the first is about sense of community generally. A variety of themes are integral to a feeling of sense of community, such as a supportive network within a geographical location, shared understandings and a sense of belonging but, as will be discussed, the theorists have had difficulty identifying what factors actually constitute this well-used phrase.

The second theme discussed is certainty (or uncertainty), constancy and stability for the adolescent. There are factors that inherently provide instability such as moving house many times or changing schools often. Whilst it could be argued that some changes may help adolescents, the existing literature suggests that having constancy and a sense of surety is likely to facilitate the transition period.

The students' engagement and level of feeling that they belong at school are all integral to motivation to succeed there and the students' participation

enhances the feeling of community within the school. This chapter presents international and New Zealand based literature on this topic.

The fourth theme is wellbeing. There is a general overview of what constitutes the term, the many benefits of wellbeing and how it can be developed and encouraged in the school setting.

A review of literature about social capital is then presented. Social capital is a resource that can be used to help a person progress. This advancement will be subjective but just as financial capital can be converted into goods that can help materially, social capital can be converted to facilitate social benefit.

The next section provides a comparison of literature about some of the psychological factors that may influence the adolescents as they begin to transition from school to work. The final theme covered in the literature review is the current neoliberal ideology and how this may affect the transition period. Neoliberal government policies encourage competition and individualism which are intended to uplift everyone's standard of living and level of wellbeing. There is no doubt that some adolescents will be unaffected or benefit from, the current ideological framework but others may find it more difficult than ideologies with a stronger collectivist framework.

### **Sense of community**

Sense of community can evoke images of village life where the inhabitants know each other and help each other, and there is a general belief that these prosocial behaviours are the glue that keeps everyone together. What is particularly interesting is that the ease with which this picture is produced in one's mind's eye is very far removed from actually pinning down the theoretical basis

of what constitutes sense of community. The following section spends some time discussing what the literature defines as sense of community. This is important because within the social sciences, like the hard sciences, it is important to be able to measure the strength of a particular construct. It also has to be valid and thus represent the precisely relevant construct.

### **Definition of sense of community.**

Sarason (1974) states that 'sense of community' is an easily understood term and that it is a "mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend" (p.1). Yet this phrase, which portrays so much, is difficult to define and there have been many attempts to be able to find a theoretical basis for the term (Amit, 2002). Amit further explains that efforts were abandoned as it was proving elusive and relegated to "either exceptional or inexplicable" (p.17). There seemed little benefit of finding the factors that were measurable and yet sense of community appears to be an enduring concept (Amit). Bess, Fisher, Sonn, and Bishop (2002) agree that there are many definitions but that sociologists in particular are keen to find definition in order to realise the impact of sense of community. Technological advances and, paradoxically, globalisation only increased this interest Amit (2002). The mobility of people, particularly towards the cities, raises the questions of how relationships are created in that environment. Sarason (1974) stated that finding the constructs of sense of community can help reduce the problems associated with individualism – such as alienation and selfishness. As Day (2006) explains Tonnies defined *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* – two different social associations – one linking for common good and one just to get what is required from the other. *Gemeinschaft* may be

aligned to, or a part of, sense of community in that the social interaction is intended to be linked action that will result in the common good.

Sense of community has an accumulation of properties that are difficult to define but provide a construct for something that can encapsulate connection between people for the common good and possibly some shared meanings that ease social interactions. This accumulation (possibly more than a linear measure) of all the linkages benefits the inhabitants and the community as a whole.

### **Psychological need.**

Humans are primarily social and we value good relationships with other people. They are essential for the continuance of the species (a biological requirement) but they are also important for our sense of wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). There are several psychological factors that can affect our wellbeing that are associated with sense of community. The first of these is related to the political ideology of neoliberalism.

Amit (2002) cites Cohen (1982) who argues that as the structure of society is lessened in a free market economy, the symbolic structure of a community may be seen as increasingly important to people. She explains that Cohen suggested that if a locality is under threat from global forces, it may look for a stronger community. This may be akin to the phenomenon that occurs in towns and cities whereby people tend to look for ways of avoiding isolation. This can be by organising groups such as sports groups and parents banding together. Of course, there may be the practical reasons for joining a group but it does seem that humans do seek to link with other members of their community – however that physical space is laid out.

Signon, Whitcomb, and Snyder (2002) have developed a model in which they suggest there is a strong psychological link through sense of belonging and self-identity to a geographical location. There is a strong psychological need for identity (Lawler, 2014) but much of identity and certainly social identity involves social connection. Group identity is also part of a person's identity and this consists of the various social groupings a person belongs to – and does not belong to (and creates separation from that group). Pretty (2002) also includes a geographical space and suggests that place identity is part of self-identity. This environmental psychology approach means that the community, and the relationships forged through the geographical location and social cohesion, allow a person's social identity and self-identity to be developed.

Amit (2002) clarifies that a sense of community does not mean that there has to be complete participation in everything for there to be a social connection and feeling of belonging. There needs to be an emotional connection that provides a sense of belonging in a particular space but it is not one fixed link to an individual or group. The strength of the links will be based on individual association as well as at the collective level.

As Drury (2014) explains people develop or at least refine their senses to navigate our interactions with others. It may be that strong communities provide their members with the opportunity to develop these senses well. He refers to “relational mindfulness” (2014, p.14) and that there is scope for making society more altruistic. The psychological need may best be determined by the fact that human beings are social and seek out company. Urban developments are recognising the importance of people living in environments which give them the opportunity to socialise and be part of reciprocating groups. A problem of the

current neoliberal policies is that they focus on the individual but sense of community can fulfil that psychological need for solidarity within a group of people.

**The domain of sense of community.**

Bess et al. (2002) explains that it is not possible to define community and asks whether it is a physical location or a relational construct. If it is relational, the further question is raised as to what constitutes the relationship. Day (2006) posits that the word community is far too vague, and that it does not actually say anything of value about a society and yet the term, sense of community, remains in use by policy makers, social scientists and in everyday use.

Poggi and Sciortino (2008) explain that Durkheim stated that a community makes its bonds and behaves according to those bonds. This helps to consolidate the community and these links will have an influence on how someone feels and how they behave. According to Durkheim this process has no biological or psychological basis – it is because that community places some value on that behaviour and way of thinking. These behaviours and way of thinking then become the norm and routine practice which forms the community. Durkheim believed that the term has behavioural, cognitive and affective properties and he added consideration of “morphological” factors (Poggie & Sciortino, 2008, p. 21) which will be size and/or geography of a community. Chipuer and Pretty (1999) raised the question of whether sense of community is cognitive, behavioural, an affective state, an environmental thing, or if it has some spiritual dimension.

Cohen (1982) cited by Amit (2002) also includes a geographical space – along with culture, values, group identity, and relationships. Day (2006) cites Nesbit who takes this a step further and explains a community as having an

emotional connection to a geographical space which provides a sense of belonging in that place. Hodgetts et al. (2010) acknowledge that there is a spatial component but that it incorporates social processes too and Wittel (2001) states community involves “stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging. It involves strong and lasting ties, proximity and a common history or narrative of the collective” (p.51). From this range of factors, it is apparent that sense of community comprises emotional bonds between a society, shared meanings and shared history, prosocial behaviour including reciprocity and all living within a particular geographical space. This geography is part of the accumulation of the sense of community.

A question that is raised by Bess et al. (2002) is whether to measure the individual or the community to assess sense of community. Day (2006) suggests that the term encapsulates social relationships felt at individual level by the actors and also at a collective level amongst that community. Bateman (2002) agrees that place identity is part of a person’s self-identity, and the community and relationships all combine to build social and self-identity and social cohesion. It is suggested this perspective would resonate with the Māori connection to land and topographical features (Williams, 2007). Amit (2002) also refers to the emotional connection that provides a sense of belonging in a particular place. She cites Cohen’s “peoplehood” in which there will be feelings of connection to a geographical place felt at both an individual level and a collective feeling of belonging.

The domain of sense of community is broad and, like the definition, difficult to isolate. It could probably remain as a somewhat nebulous descriptor of

bygone village-life except that it is being cultivated in contemporary settings because it has been found to help provide a sense of wellbeing.

### **What could be measurable?**

Granovetter (1973) begins to uncover the complication of how to measure sense of community by explaining that study at micro level can reveal macro level patterns. He suggests that study of any level can be a valid measure of a society but what makes sense of community so complex, is that it is more than the sum of each factor that contributes to the overall sense of community. The synergy and dynamics caused by the interaction between each factor also needs to be incorporated into the measurement.

The first attempt to measure sense of community was developed by Sarason in 1974. His was a psychological sense of community. (Sarason, 1974). Bess (2002) explains that McMillan and Chavis' 1986 research resulted in a proposed model of sense of community. This model included membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The problem with this model was that there was disagreement amongst sociologists on the true measurable constructs and with each attempt, some subjective judgements still remained as part of the measurement tool.

Signon et al.'s (2002) model of a "psychological home" (p.34) which encompasses sense of belonging/self-identity/sense of self in a geographical location and reflects the dynamic cognitive, affective and behavioural processes, does not allow for the accumulation of any feelings from the various factors.

Other models have helped to show belonging and the reciprocal commitment, but that they have omitted the role of the community and things that influence the person and the group (Hughey & Speer, 2002). Hughey and Speer

(2002) emphasise that the difficulty is that sense of community can be considered from a social perspective but it needs to incorporate the psychological aspects too.

As Day (2006) posits it is difficult to find objectivity in social relationships since the dynamics of the interaction makes it impossible to isolate and measure the different components. Bess and Fisher (2002) explain that a tool based on positivism, which uses reductionism and generalisability, is not going to be able to predict sense of community. The authors suggest that there are other constructs such as loneliness, belongingness, satisfaction, physical wellbeing, mental wellness and cohesion that are connected to various community places including work and school and will reflect some of the relational qualities. However, as Bess et al. (2002) suggest, maybe nowadays there is more acceptance of different epistemologies – and the issue of measuring sense of community can be considered again but with a loosened tie to positivism. A hermeneutic approach may be more appropriate whereby the phenomenon of the interactions and thus the context can be incorporated into the potential measuring tool.

Like any construct, it is important to establish that the factors that claim to be integral, are actually the constituents. It has to recognise the social angle as well as the psychological effects and the cumulative or, exponential, growth of these feelings. Once this validity is proven, the tool, allows the construct to be used as a predictor. One of the difficulties of the term sense of community has been developing a tool that actually measures the overall construct or the various constituents and allows for the reciprocity which is part of the community interaction.

**Disadvantage of sense of community.**

Although there may be many advantages to having a sense of community, there are also some negatives. As Hughey and Speer (2002) explain it is unrealistic to expect individuals to lose their self-interests for the betterment of the community. The political and economic ideology of neoliberalism depends upon competition within capitalism (Thatcher, 1993) and so what could be intended as the pursuit of enterprise, might be in opposition to a community trying to engender a sense of community through pooled resources. Hughey and Speer further warn against encouraging sameness and homogeneity amongst a population. They suggest that conformity, which can occur in communities, is not as effective as having differences and overcoming these differences can be motivating.

Another disadvantage of sense of community is that some communities are, in fact, subversive and can be dangerous (Bess et al., 2002). These societies could be measured to have strong linkages but may be determined as highly unhealthy on other scales and certainly could result in negative factors such as groupthink.

Granovetter (1973) also suggests that being part of a community can involve its members in having to use their time and effort. Whitham (2012) uses the term “community commitment” (2012, p.80) which does insinuate that there will be some expectation of that member of the society. As Amit (2002) explains a strong community which might provide a sense of community can also mean that people’s freedom of choice is removed as everyone is expected to be involved and attached to the society.

Sense of community is not always a good property. There are some expectations of the members of that community and there is the potential for those people unwilling to conform to the society's mores, that they will be adversely affected. Conformity of thought is not helpful and can lead to poor decision making. Having a sense of community does not equate to a prosocial or law-abiding community. There have been a number of media commentaries about communities that are very strong but also subversive and can remove a person's liberty (Violence Prevention Institute Inc, n.d.; Yeoman, 2015)

### **Constancy, certainty and a stability during the adolescent period**

There is evidence that some adolescents have better outcomes when they are living in a stable environment (Watson & McCreanor, 2004). There is increased chance for self-management and feelings of self-efficacy as well as providing a stronger sense of security. All of these factors help the adolescent's sense of wellbeing.

Certainty will take lots of forms but Watson and McCreanor (2004) state that it is essential to have ongoing involvement from caring parents. Ungar (2008) is more specific and recommends that families eat five to six meals together each week. Ungar explained that studies have factored in family connectedness and it may act as a protective factor against depression and risk taking behaviours associated with adolescents. Meal time interactions appear to create an important relationship between the adolescents and their parents but they also provide a chance for clear expectations of the parents to be expressed. These can include messages about values as well as behaviour (Ungar, 2008). Waters, Cross, and Shaw (2010) agree that connection to family is beneficial to the adolescent and Sanders and Munford (2014) advise that the quality of the relationship with the

primary caregiver is important. In a New Zealand study Denny et al. (2011) found that although the number of youths that felt they had enough parent time had reduced, the quality of those relationships had improved.

It is interesting that meal times are singled out as a key point for interaction. Perhaps the ritual of eating together has some connecting property. It may even be that since some degree of emotional control is required in order to eat a meal, and there may be the requirement for table manners, this helps the adolescent learn some prosocial life lessons.

Waters et al. (2010) asserted that when structure is in place, the students tend to feel more inclined to self-manage. This aligns with self-determination theory whereby there is likely to be more motivation if that person has a sense of control over achieving a task. This same concept may apply at community level. Hodgetts et al. (2010) explain that strongly structured communities can provide a stable environment and a sense of security.

Support can also be treated as an asset and the likelihood of problem behaviour lessens as the number of “developmental assets” increases (Small & Memmo, 2004). In addition to support and self-efficacy which has been mentioned already in relation to Waters et al (2010) work there are a number of other assets. These are defined boundaries, set expectations, time being spent in a worthwhile manner, engagement in learning, prosocial values and ability in the social setting. Pimentel (1996) also found that family factors – income and level of parent’s education - have an influence, generally on the youth’s aspirations and likely attainment of those goals. This is not surprising as a variety of factors will impede or enhance the development and subsequent pursuit of what that adolescent hopes to do.

A sense of constancy in a young person's life has been shown to help provide wellbeing as they transition through the adolescent period. Family and, in particular, family doing some things together and regularly have been found to be helpful. Certainty which also provides some solidity has also been shown to encourage a young person to self-manage which has a beneficial influence on wellbeing.

### **Youth challenges**

As Kohli et al. (2013) state, adolescence is a social construct which covers a developmental phase of a person's life where the adolescent can experience a great deal of changes. These can be associated with emotional upset, a time of experimentation, and new experiences and defiance. The authors further explain that the young person may benefit from guidance to avoid damage to self-esteem and self-confidence as well as decision making, conflict resolution and the management of emotions. The asset mentioned in the previous section, support, will be valuable.

Kelly (2003) explains that sadly adolescence is now a time of mistrust. Perhaps in the current times of uncertainty, certainty is all the more important and comforting to people (Bess et al., 2002). There is no doubt that modern society has lowered that level of certainty. Non-skilled work has reduced whereas it used to maintain a class structure (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007) which, again, brought some constancy. Societies have felt the impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism, as businesses strive for increasing efficiency and wage savings in order to be able to compete in an international market (Mills & Blossfeld, 2009). Jobs for life no longer exist generally and the necessity for mobility in order to find work has a further bearing on this inter-generational stability (Bottrell &

Armstrong, 2007). Rather bleakly, some contemporary societies are having to deal with insecurity and uncertainty as people face humiliation and marginalisation (Bauman, 2011).

Family disruption has been shown to be a major cause of distress to young people (Frydenberg, 2008). Separations and divorce lessen the certainty for the children when they move between parents (Bottrell, 2009a). A quarter of New Zealand's children will have spent some time living in a sole parent household by the age of 15 (Robertson, Pryor, & Moss, 2009). Whilst this in itself may not be a threat to wellbeing, parents who have been involved in family conflict, separation or divorce are financially worse off. Silverberg Koerner, Korn, Peltz Dennison, and Witthoft (2011) cite Sayer (2006) who suggests that this is particularly in the early years after the separation and adolescents are affected by this loss of family finances when the solo parent's income can drop by as much as 50%. Denny et al.'s (2011) study of the 2007 schools survey found that fewer New Zealand adolescents felt that they spent enough time with their parents than when the previous survey was conducted in 2001. The authors did not specify what caused the parents to not spend sufficient time with their children but, as mentioned earlier, the authors reported that there has been an improvement in the number of students who had a good relationship with their parents.

Kim and Schneider (2005) cited Coleman's (1988) work about social relationships and how these links create group and individual norms of behaviour. They explain that this places expectations on that society's young people. It is suggested that these expectations are now in everyday discourse which places pressure on adolescents to behave in the manner of an accomplished and contributing citizen, and yet contemporary society has less certainty than in recent

past generations. The risk factors associated with adolescents tend to be stated as simple issues but as Armstrong (2006) states, they are very complex and involve the individual and that person's peers and families. Giannakopoulos et al. (2009) explain that physical, social, emotional and education outcomes are reliant on family experience. Bottrell, Armstrong, and France (2010) assert that social class remains the main predictor of educational outcomes and yet educational failure is assigned to an individual whilst their risk status is assigned to their social class. These assertions emphasise both the complexity and the unfairness of when an adolescent does not behave in a completely socially acceptable way, it is socially constructed as a problem. One of the issues in discourse about youth is that it is a homogenous group (Sharland, 2006). Shanahan and Longest (2009) suggest that this does not serve the adolescents well as their range of factors such as experience, potential, characteristics and opportunities are ignored. Kelly (2003) explains that there is also an element of hegemony in neoliberalist societies in that there is a construct of an 'ideal' citizen. This individual is self-moderating, motivated and has a well laid out pathway to a successful career. This discourse highlights that well-functioning, self-controlling equates to a future, and risky behaviour is associated with alienation and a lack of opportunity (Kelly, 2003). Kelly (2003) discusses the construct "normal" as used in everyday discourse. This may be used as a mental shortcut to portray some mainstream characteristics, behaviours and cognitions but it also means that anybody who does not conform may be "abnormal".

Certainty is not assured in contemporary society. Just a few of those reasons will be that an adolescent's parent's employment is less certain, there is more geographical mobility in the search for work and family unity is less assured

with a high proportion of separations and divorce. Another challenge for adolescents is that they can be regarded as untrustworthy. Both uncertainty in an adolescent's life and being mistrusted are threats to their wellbeing.

### **School community and sense of belonging**

Schools have an important impact on the emotional and social development of a child (Marsh et al., 2014). The level of engagement by a student is associated with school success, a reduction in risky behaviour and healthier lifestyle (Marsh et al., 2014). Students who are disengaged are more likely to participate in negative behaviours and have a lower chance of academic success (Covell, 2010; Markham & Aveyard, 2003). Conversely, and not surprisingly, a student who is well engaged, tends to use prosocial behaviour and have better academic outcomes which, as Markham and Aveyard (2003) explain, allow for higher levels of health and wellbeing. These good outcomes have an impact on self-esteem at the time and in the future (Covell, 2010). Consequently good engagement as a student is important for that person's adult life and as Marsh et al. (2014) explain, the schools can influence the level of commitment.

Bottrell (2009a) suggests that a sense of belonging brings positive learning skills to a peer group when that sector of the community is not marginalised or disadvantaged. If they are, then the types of behaviour they tend to learn and indulge in, are anti-social and result in educational failure. Bottrell's 2009 research was based on marginalised communities, which may have limited application to the current study but she explains that whilst friendships and families are very important, growing up together in a neighbourhood with all their lifelong connections, makes for a network that provides social, emotional and

material resources. Although the environment may be more disadvantaged, it does reinforce the importance of residential stability.

Bottrell and Armstrong (2007) explain that a lack of sense of belonging will be compounded when a young person is excluded from school. They become more vulnerable to being marginalised by mainstream society. The authors explain that in the current neoliberalist setting, a youth who has been marginalised tends to turn to youth culture for a sense of identity, belonging, and an alternative transition to adulthood, and becomes more at risk. Bottrell and Armstrong (2012) assert that the current models of intervention to re-engage youth which have involved setting expectations (or forcing) youth into compliance have been unsuccessful. Sanders and Munford (2014) state all youth are valuable resources and should be nurtured. They suggest that if positive youth psychology is used and the risk-taking behaviours associated with youth are seen as part of the development phase of adolescence, it puts an entirely different perspective on the potential of youth. This social construction of youth who are demonstrating behaviours outside the 'ideal' will be discussed later in the findings chapter.

Population Health (2014) surveyed adolescents in the Coromandel region and found that supportive community relationships are very important to youth. Another factor that will have a bearing on sense of belonging is how long an adolescent has remained in a particular community. As Denny et al. (2011) explain, their schools survey identified that close to 13% of students had moved house twice in the previous 12 months. It is not stated whether this move resulted in moving school too. Whilst it needs to be recognised that, in some cases, moving school can be of benefit to an adolescent, it is also going to be associated with many changes and as we have learnt, adolescents respond well to stability.

Waters et al. (2009) have considered whether connectedness within a school is inherent to that school or can be one of the outcomes of a school where positive relationships are encouraged and cultivated. Their research suggests that the ecology comes from leadership as well as how well the school functions. Waters et al. (2009) explain that class size, student involvement in decision making, the fairness of the discipline, and clarity of the rules all play a part in creating a connected school community.

Markham and Aveyard (2003) suggest that it is not necessary to teach health but it is vital that students have an understanding of how to consider a problem and learning to know how to go about solving this problem. Another essential element is that the students need to recognise that their ability to be part of a group requires that they understand the others' points of view, they all have shared values and have a way of meeting each other's need for support. With this in place they will have a sense of belonging.

Waters et al. (2010) agree that the ecosystem that is the school, is important and they have named the aspects that will allow for a sense of belonging and community which, in turn, can result in fewer behavioural problems and increased duration at school. These are school size, the number of year levels, leadership, how students interact, clearly stated expectations, student input into the decision making process, participation in extra-curricular activities, provision for pastoral care and the actual buildings and grounds contribute to the model. The authors explain that the student having a good relationship with his or her parent and teacher will be beneficial but that there is one additional factor which can be created that will enhance a student's connection to school. This

factor is ensuring that a smooth transition into high school is achieved (Waters et al., 2010).

Lester, Waters, and Cross (2013) have found that some students are already somewhat disengaged before they enter high school, but creating and developing connection can help them to be incorporated into the school network. This will, in turn, have a positive effect on their emotional wellness and has been shown to reduce risky behaviour (Lester et al., 2013).

The time that an adolescent spends at school can be vitally important to their sense of wellbeing. It will be key that a student is engaged in the school as any disengagement can be a threat to their wellbeing and is likely to result in not gaining the academic success to which they had the potential to achieve. Engagement in school has multiple benefits for the adolescent. The process of connection to the school has been well researched and the time when a child enters secondary school is a point at which engagement can be established. This is discussed further in the next section.

### **Development of school engagement.**

It is important to engender engagement so that there is “educational resilience” (Covell, 2010, p.40). This is where a pupil can still succeed and have good educational outcomes notwithstanding being at increased vulnerability due to environmental and social circumstances. One of the valuable ways of enhancing engagement is through ensuring that a student’s rights are fully and genuinely respected (Covell, 2010). New Zealand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and, as such, has an obligation to ensure that children are fully respected (United Nations

Children's Fund, n.d.) by incorporating these principles into school policies and all aspects of school life (Boston, 2014; Covell, 2010).

Markham and Aveyard (2003) explain that it is important to allow students to gain practical reasoning skills and also learn to have empathy and concern for others. The authors cite Nussbaum (1990) who explains “capacities for practical reasoning and affiliation” are essential skills. Relationships based on shared values, understanding other people’s perspectives and reciprocal benefits, all promote a prosocial identity. These authors also suggest that when a student holds a position of responsibility, they have increased engagement.

Marsh et al. (2014) agree that major investments do not need to be made in lots of specialist teachers. Previous research had shown that the most likely predictor of successful outcome was pupil to pupil relationships, but Marsh et al. suggest that good relationships between students and staff are the most important factors. Parents’ involvement in the school was important (Marsh et al., 2014).

Bateman (2002) recommends that extra-mural school clubs encourage teamwork which encourages engagement. She explains that students work in teams to pursue a common goal but without the pressure of the classroom and the need for high marks. If these teams have a cross-section of ages, this assists in intra-school linkage – all of which promotes a sense of community within the school.

Self-determination theory defines one of the motivators for an actor to make a particular choice (Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013). It explains that the individual wishes to follow an action because it aligns with his or her values. The theory determines that the more the person reflects on, and complies

with, these values, the more positive the outcomes and sense of wellbeing (Smith et al., 2013). The importance of self-direction encourages self-management, self-regulation and encourages intrinsic motivation (i.e. inspired to do a particular action because it is something that they wish to achieve (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2011)). Pupils understand that they have rights which encourages a sense of value. This is fundamental to children as they need to understand that they are valued because of who they are and not what they can achieve. This concept has been shown to help a child's self-esteem and this has the compounding effect of helping a child to be more engaged in the school (Covell, 2010). Fairness of treatment will also have a strong bearing on the emotional wellbeing of the student (Marsh et al., 2014).

Pretty (2002) states that there is a normal expectation amongst most functioning societies that a person will become, at least to some extent, interested in their community and there is some evidence to show that it can be shaped whilst the young person is still in school. Markham and Aveyard (2003) explain that it is helpful to create a union between school and community. They suggest that the two may have different values but by finding communal interests, in an atmosphere of encouraging welfare, connection can be developed. This is particularly important for students who may be susceptible to alienation or disengagement and can help keep those students engaged. Creating superordinate goals and creating shared opportunities and tasks have also been shown to develop intra-pupil relationships which, in turn, increase engagement (Markham & Aveyard, 2003). The authors also suggest developing more interaction between the different subjects as this allows for pupils to understand epistemologies and that "knowledge is socially constructed" (Markham & Aveyard, 2003, p.1216).

Pupils learn that there are many different viewpoints and can also develop their practical reasoning skills. Interestingly these aspects are not usually taught until tertiary level and yet have been shown to help self-realisation which can assist in engagement in school and this can ultimately result in enhanced wellbeing.

Unsurprisingly exclusion from school is counter to a sense of engagement with the school and leads to more likelihood of education failure (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012). There are some general assumptions that a student's lack of commitment to education, and behaviour that is not conducive to learning, is always the student's fault, but how that resistance is framed will have a bearing on how that student is treated. A calm style of teaching is believed to help a student and as Bottrell and Armstrong (2012) suggest, sometimes students are being made less engaged by the school "disengaging them" (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012, p.257).

The built environment can also have an influence on sense of belonging and engagement within the school. Pleasant seating in the grounds which encourages interaction and attractive surroundings has been found to be correlated with connection to the school (Waters et al., 2010). Another influence is when there are low levels/no graffiti. Waters et al. (2010) explain though that there may be less because students are more engaged rather than the absence of graffiti affecting emotions and cognition.

The students have to have the motivation to want to be committed to the community. There are some actions that can be done by the school that actually encourage that interest. These include allowing the adolescent to understand that they can have self-efficacy, are encouraged to participate, that their rights are respected and that they have a say in school policy. There are some aspects of the

layout of the school which can also help a pupil to feel more embedded. If the adolescent is well engaged and committed to the learning and social environment of the school, it is highly likely to have a good effect on their sense of wellbeing.

### **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is a term used in contemporary society which covers a variety of different disciplines such as economics, medicine, philosophy, psychology, social geography and sociology (Rablen, 2012). Gross national product which has been used as an indicator of a country's economic wellbeing has been usurped by Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan (Beveridge, 2015) as the preferred gauge of the country's success. David Cameron, then Conservative Prime Minister of Britain has also acknowledged that wellbeing needs to be an objective of Britain's public policy, and that measures of the country's performance should incorporate the population's level of happiness and wellbeing (Rablen, 2012). Wellbeing is a term which incorporates physical, social and emotional aspects and describes more than the absence of ill health.

Wellbeing is positively correlated to a number of physical health benefits. Sanders and Munford (2014) have measured that increased sense of wellbeing and resilience is associated with reduced risk taking behaviours. It is also a term covering quality of life at both individual and societal levels (Viñas, González, Malo, García, & Casas, 2014). It appears that some people have an increased capacity for wellbeing due to their personality characteristics and the authors quantify the proportions. They state that half of wellbeing is a person's personality and disposition, 10% is a person's situation, and 40% by choices made by that person's "intentional activity" (p356). Rablen (2012) agrees that it is a

subjective measure and tends to align with how well a person's life is going for them but explains that it is not being used consistently.

Kohli et al. (2013) states that “wellbeing is a dynamic concept that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviours” (p.149). Kohli further explains that it appears to require good physical and psychological health which results in a sense of satisfaction.

There are a number of contributors to wellbeing. It is enhanced by physical activity (Viñas et al., 2014) but possibly the strongest predictor is social connection – particularly having a partner but also frequent contact with family and friends (Rablen, 2012). Other contributors are reciprocity and a feeling of trustworthiness to others (Rablen, 2012).

Viñas et al. (2014) explain that a person's temperament contributes to a sense of wellbeing, and their study found a significant correlation between wellbeing and factors that resulted in staying on task and achieving goals. They also found a relationship between physical activity and wellbeing. Vinas et al. found that extroverts had higher levels of wellbeing than introverts, and that kindness was the most helpful characteristic for wellbeing. Other characteristics which resulted in a lower sense of wellbeing were neuroticism and/or emotional instability. Adolescent wellbeing is positively correlated with self-esteem (Myers, Willse, & Villalba, 2011). There are several reasons for this but one of the reasons is that self-esteem is amongst the strongest predictors of coping with adversity (Frydenberg, 2008). If the adolescent has the life experience to know that they can cope with difficult situations, they will feel a mastery which will provide increased self-esteem which helps to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

Interestingly, wealth beyond a certain point is not a major contributor to wellbeing. Rablen (2012) explains the Easterlin's paradox which has found that in developed countries, wellbeing is constant once a particular threshold has been reached. The threshold ensures that basic needs are met but beyond a moderate sum, the benefits of income are relative rather than absolute. In other words, if everyone around a wealthier person is similarly wealthy, there is no real improvement in happiness. It appears that job satisfaction has more of a bearing on a sense of wellbeing although having a job has an even bigger influence on wellbeing, particularly for a male (Rablen, 2012).

Giannakopoulos et al. (2009) discuss quality of life which can align with wellbeing and that it requires satisfaction with the subject's cultural and intellectual situation of living. Kohli et al. (2013) also includes environment and suggests it plays a substantial role in shaping personality and is a source of support and modelling behaviour. This then relates to wellbeing in that it is the subjective evaluation of a person's life in relation to cognitive evaluation (satisfaction) and emotional reaction (affect).

Kohli et al. (2013) explain that "Adolescents with higher than average psychological well being [sic] are regarded as more successful in meeting situational demands and stressors" (p.150). Waters et al. (2009) suggest that school connectedness correlates strongly with wellbeing as well as better academic outcomes and better mental health outcomes. Denny et al. (2011) have found that the main threats to wellbeing in adolescence are risky behaviour and emotional problems.

Wellbeing is the central concern in this research project. Many factors including the individual's personality and temperament, social connection, the

environment in which they live and how the young people are treated and trusted will influence wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing has been shown to have physiological benefits such as resistance to viruses and, as we know, physical activity is positively correlated with overall wellbeing. Wellbeing can be developed as will be discussed in the next section.

### **Development of wellbeing.**

Wellbeing can be enhanced by a variety of means. As mentioned in relation to certainty, Ungar (2008) explains that the act of families eating together can enhance an adolescent's sense of wellbeing. This has been shown to result in less depression, suicide attempts, suicide ideation, smoking, binge drinking and illicit drug use. Ungar continues that the studies have factored in family connectedness but there still seems to be an additional protective aspect and that frequency of shared meals correlates with a sense of wellbeing. Conversely, Frydenberg (2008) explains that family breakdown and parental conflict are major causes of stress to adolescents and can reduce the child's ability to regulate his or her emotions (Vanassche, Sodermans, Matthijs, & Swicegood, 2013).

Participation in active leisure has been found to be helpful in coping with stress, socialisation and physical and mental wellbeing (Shin & You, 2013). Shin and You (2013) cite Sacker and Cable (2006) who suggest that participation in activities can have a predictive measure of wellbeing 15 years later and possibly even further. The mechanism for increased wellbeing is not known – it could be that improved social skills, athleticism, competencies, or that there are improved feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth which bring about increases in wellbeing. The research did not find a direct link between participation and increased

wellbeing – there was a mediator and that was leisure satisfaction (Shin & You, 2013).

There are evidence based processes that can increase the adolescent's sense of wellbeing. An increased sense of wellbeing can, in turn, increase motivation to achieve, reduce risky behaviours, reduce depression and provide a range of other benefits. It has to be recognised that there can be difficulties in all modern families managing to achieve actions such as meals eaten regularly together. There are many situations, such as shift work, that make this unfeasible but quality family time will have a positive influence on their child's wellbeing at home and at school.

#### **Wellbeing within the school environment.**

Students spend a large amount of time at school and how they experience it will have a bearing on both their academic outcome and their sense of wellbeing (Saab & Klinger, 2010). Just being made to feel welcome will have a strong bearing on the student's sense of wellbeing and level of engagement (Wylie & Hodgen, 2008) because schools are also social settings (Saab & Klinger, 2010). The transition from primary to secondary school is one area which can impact on the psychological, social and intellectual wellbeing of the student (Lester et al., 2013). Their research showed that it is important to ensure that there is a strong sense of care for children in primary schools so that they feel connected to school and then once they make the move, there is another opportunity to create a relationship between student and school. This connection needs to be well embedded within the first two years of secondary school to act as a strong protective factor against a range of negative behaviours that compromise wellbeing, such as aggression (Lester et al., 2013).

Sanders and Munford (2014) found that school environment has a strong influence on an adolescent's wellbeing. The authors identified that the consistent use of quality support that focussed on a positive youth model rather than trying to overcome risk factors was related to wellbeing. Waters et al. (2009) agree that school connectedness has a strong bearing on wellbeing and this, in turn, affects outcomes. The authors conducted an extensive literature review about connectedness and how that relates to outcomes.

Waters et al. (2010) consider why some students manage to make a better connection than others in a different school. One of those factors appears to be an extension of self-determination theory in which, if the structures are in place, a student feels more motivated to self-manage. They have also identified other factors that can have a positive bearing on connection which has been shown to contribute to a sense of wellbeing. These are connection to family and connection to other adults, including teachers, and all these positive relationships will enhance sense of wellbeing (Waters et al., 2010).

Like within the family setting, schools can also provide great opportunities to increase a student's sense of wellbeing. The major influence is the connection that that student has with the school, the other pupils and the staff. The literature emphasises that good relationships with people who will have a positive effect on the adolescent are very important.

### **Social capital**

Capital is the materialized asset accumulated as a result of human effort (Bourdieu, 1986). There are several types of capital with economic being used by many people, at least in the Westernised world, to purchase goods with the intention of making a profit. Bottrell (2009a) explains that youth friendships and

broader peer networks are primarily for help-seeking, increased emotional intelligence and problem solving skills. This all helps confidence, support of each other and resilience.

Other forms are cultural, human and social capitals. Cultural capital is accumulated (or lost) by the characteristics of the actor. Cultural capital can influence the social mobility of a person, particularly when it is transferred into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Human capital is when investment is made in a person. This can be by developing their physical capability, mental ability or another skill through training and hard work and can, in turn be exchanged for economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is the accumulation of social relationships and linkages that can be used for the actor's benefit (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bassani (2007) it is the product of social relations such as trust, self-confidence, loyalty and security that people have which, for young people, will come from their families and their peers. Social capital can be used to gain economic capital but, as Hodgetts et al. (2010) explain, it can also be used at a collective level to help an entire community. There is much overlap and similarity between social capital and sense of community (Bess et al., 2002). Bateman (2002) agrees and cite Burt's 2000 work where he suggests that social capital is closest to sense of community. However, as Bassani explains, social capital is an available asset and can be used for advantage whereas sense of community perhaps is more emotive although it too can have the potential for being converted into a resource. Social capital is about networks, the strength and number of connections in a community (Bourdieu, 1986). These connections appear to help make someone more resilient and acts as a buffer against the difficulties associated with some adverse circumstances (Bottrell, 2009a). Social

capital is seen as a link between people in a particular community that can result in a shared network of support (Hodgetts et al., 2010). It results from social interactions (Bassani, 2007). Aminzadeh et al. (2013) explain that social capital is a term used to encapsulate a range of behaviours, emotions and cognition that assists and advantages members of a community. Like other forms of capital – such as financial or cultural - social capital tends to be an asset (Bassani, 2007).

Social capital can be measured at individual and societal level (Berry & Welsh, 2010; Bottrell, 2009a) and a strong social capital at both individual level and community level is correlated to adolescent wellbeing (Bottrell, 2009a). Interestingly, Kim and Schneider (2005) state that the benefit (or otherwise) of social capital has not been explored greatly in relation to how an adolescent transitions after school. The domains that cover social capital are very similar to those that influence the strength of sense of community. The accumulation of social links, that social capital can also be measured at collective and individual levels and that it incorporates behavioural, cognitive and affective factors does indicate that, like Bess et al. (2002) suggest, it may be very similar to sense of community. Social capital does need to be converted into a usable resource whereas sense of community might solely be a measure and, in itself not something that can be transformed into a commodity. This will be discussed in the findings chapter.

### **Benefits of social capital**

There are some clear associations between social capital and good health (Berry & Welsh, 2010; Hodgetts et al., 2010) and the broader termed wellbeing (Bassani, 2007). Apart from health, social capital which is about the quality and availability of social connections, is believed to play a very strong part in

wellbeing (Rablen, 2012). Within social capital, will be a level of understanding, trust and mutual benefit. Social capital has also been found to have a mediating influence against various adverse situations such as unemployment, living alone and poverty (Berry & Welsh, 2010).

Social capital can bring increased trust and shared norms amongst a group of people (Bottrell, 2009a). The author explains that this acts as a buffer to adversity and has been shown to increase resiliency. There are two types of social capital as suggested by Putnam (1995) – bonding in which there will be a homogeneity amongst the members of the group and bridging where there are different social groups that link. Both provide reciprocity. Putnam (1995) contended that low socio-economic status resulted in a lack of social capital but Hodgetts et al. (2010) argue that they may have good well-connected communities *if* they have social capital. Bottrell (2009a) expands on this by explaining that social capital can be very helpful in the process of a person adapting in spite of their lower socio economic status. Hodgetts et al. (2010) also explain that collective projects create a bond which can have psychological benefits as well as the intended gains. The community interaction can be facilitated by suitable environments including buildings.

### **Disadvantages of social capital.**

Whilst social capital appears to be protective and can enhance resilience (Aminzadeh et al., 2013), it can have some adverse effects too. Bottrell (2009a) agrees that there are some negatives but suggests that some of the benefits of bridging capital will not even be available to those young people who have been marginalised. She explains that they may have bonding capital – and the advantages and disadvantages that come from this connection such as reinforcing

detrimental activities - but they will be unlikely to gain by any social capital from another group who might be able to help them out of their alienation. Bottrell (2009a) explains that the factors that can allow the development of social capital are trust and shared norms, and these factors appear to act as a buffer. Part of the social capital will be the quality of parenting and the strength of the family unit but it will also extend to the neighbourhood and the quality of the social networks and supports (Bottrell, 2009a). Berry and Welsh (2010) agree that there are some negatives associated with social capital and result in poorer health than might have existed in the absence of the linkages. However, they suggest that the problem is not with social capital but with how it is measured in some research. They stipulate that the constructs that comprise social capital are cohesion and participation including a sense of belonging, trust and reciprocity.

Bassani (2007) asserts that, generally there is a positive correlation between social capital and wellbeing, but that in some cultures too much social capital can be constraining. This could mean that, because of the strong level of resources available, the adolescent is stifled from pursuing their own pathway as they move towards adulthood

Any relationships between people who are engaging in risky or negative behaviours will threaten wellbeing but the strength of the benefits of the relationship may still outweigh the potential damage. Most of the disadvantages associated with social capital are the absence of it and that, without it, the adolescent may not have access to the same level of benefits as someone with more social capital. It should be noted though that having social capital does not equate to prosocial behaviours – and example being that dishonest Brazilian

officials were able to maintain corruption *because* of their close network and reciprocal social ties (Baquero, 2015).

### **Social capital in the school setting.**

Social capital is available in the school setting but will be dependent upon the school community – staff, students, the structure of the school and probably students' families' involvement. Bassani (2007) suggests that if the ratio of staff to students rises, then it is likely to have a negative effect on social capital. In addition to a functioning environment, the values amongst the school need to be similar – otherwise the members of the school are unlikely to have much connection which encourages association which will engender social capital. As Bottrell's (2009a) research with marginalised adolescent females showed, within the girls' community, one of the norms was being caring and loyal. They helped others and can rely on help from others. Another finding was that the girls' loyalty extended to even when someone had done something that was wrong or bad. All these traits would foster bonding social capital.

### **Development of social capital.**

Social capital can be developed and yet there is very little investment made in setting up strategies that will encourage the networks that can provide this potential resource (Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2004) It can help much more than just the emotional wellbeing of the people in the community, it can save health costs and improve the earning potential of the inhabitants (Putnam et al., 2004). Since it is enhanced by interaction, the physical environment can influence the amount of foot traffic and incidental socialisation (Wood et al., 2008). Creating places where people feel safe, i.e. the perception of safety, has been shown to enhance interaction. Urban development has tended to not

consider this aspect and the result has been less activity and more health related issues due to lack of exercise and also weaker social bonds (Wood et al., 2008). Appropriate street configuration and mixed land use appear to encourage social capital and sense of community. The authors explain that if planned well, the distances and type of street encourages walking which results in a greater chance of social exchanges. Wood et al. (2008) suggest that another way of fostering social capital is when parents participate in activities in the area.

It may have overlap with other capitals such as cultural capital and economic capital but it can exist without economic capital (France, Bottrell, & Haddon, 2012). Social capital is a factor that can be engineered. As has been already noted, a well-functioning school community is one way in which social capital can be developed. Hodgetts et al. (2010) cite Putland (2008) who proposes that it can be developed through the arts and the results of social capital include more trusting relationships between members of the community and increased cohesion as well as valuing members of the community and also providing a sense of bilateral support. Another method of engendering social capital (and along with it resilience), is by the community participating in acts of generosity to others.

Intergenerational unemployment will have a severe impact on social capital with youths and their families probably having limited contacts that can help the youth to get a foot in the employment door. Māori and Pacific Peoples who are disproportionately affected by unemployment may be most constrained (Bibbee, 2013).

### **Measurement of social capital.**

Bassani (2007) suggests that social capital has five elements. These are the variety of capitals (social, financial, cultural); that the association between capital and wellbeing exists and that the relationship may be more than linear. The social capital must be converted into useable resources and it has to be developed in prosocial relationships rather than unhealthy behaviours being the primary bonding characteristic. The last factor is that bridging between the different groups will strengthen the social capital.

Bassani's fourth requirement for the development of social capital contradicts Bottrell (2009a) who believes that social capital can, and does, mature in even the harshest of social environments. However, exploration of Bassani's model does suggest that there can be non-linear growth of social capital and, particularly so, for youth. Young peoples' social capital is distinctly different from adults since family is such an important influence, but social class, ethnicity and gender will also probably have a major effect. The other forms of capital such as financial and human (i.e. education or a particular skill within a social group) will possibly have less of a bearing. Bassani (2007) suggests that cultural capital is likely to be secondary to social capital but France et al. (2012) would recognise this as being an important part of many adolescents' store of how to navigate the period between childhood and adulthood.

Cultural capital is "knowing the game" (France et al, 2012, p.600). It emanates from a particular location but it is probably closely related to street credibility and can be a powerful influence and mediator for young people to negotiate everyday life (France et al., 2012). An example of cultural capital that overflows to financial capital is a car. A car can be a very powerful asset and

status symbol to that culture. Risk can be associated with cultural capital and Bottrell and Armstrong (2007) explain, some negative behaviour has a “sense of ordinariness” (p.364). So, using the car example, driving at high speed and dangerously may be the accepted manner rather than abiding by the speed limit and not using a vehicle without the appropriate licence and insurance. This association with a threat to wellbeing (the risk) and the ordinariness with which it is perceived, may be protective for the young people. These “badges of honour” increase self-esteem, which helps the ability to cope in their adverse environment and, this in turn, will enhance sense of wellbeing.

### **Moving out of the school community**

Part of the period of adolescence concerns the transition from school life to the adult world and whilst most youth become citizens of their community (Kelly, 2003), it can be a period in which risky behaviour, uncertainty and a range of emotions, can create confusion, conflict and disapproval. It can also be a time of certainty when the adolescent has a clear and exciting path ahead of them.

Physical health, as has been discussed, is associated with psychological wellbeing and improved affect, self-esteem, less anxiety and depression, as well as also impacting on sense of purpose, quality of life and satisfaction with life. Importantly Martinez, Martin, Liem, and Colmar (2012) have also found that physical health is a predictor of these benefits but the amount of physical exercise generally lessens once a person leaves school, as other demands on their time can overtake the desire to participate in sport (Martinez et al., 2012). Unfortunately this decline in participation can coincide with a period of uncertainty when the adolescent has moved out of the school environment. However promoting participation in sport has been shown to have many benefits. It is believed to

encourage long term involvement which results in social connection and all the resultant mental and physical benefits (Brooks & Magnusson, 2006). Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1990) put it simply when they explain that proficiencies required for sport, are life skills too. The ability to be able to concentrate, cope, mix with other people, be engaged and committed, have emotional control and make decisions are all important attributes, and having these skills will increase self-esteem and confidence (Danish et al., 1990).

Shin and You (2013) agree and cite Tinsley, Bretett and Kass's 1977 work in which they suggest that differing activities suit and align with a person's age, stage of life and environment. As adolescents, the young people begin to select their own activities and pursuits and this is vital to learning social norms and will help to start to build a sense of autonomy. Consequently it is important to ensure that physical activity is available and encouraged during this transition period (Martinez et al., 2012).

Hoye, Nicholson, and Brown (2015) demonstrate that involvement in sport increases the opportunities for social connection which can then be used in the form of social capital. Sport has been shown to increase confidence, improve self-esteem, help forge a stronger sense of self-identity, reduce anti-social behaviour and increase feelings of reciprocity (Hoye et al., 2015). Brooks and Magnusson (2006) explain that a student's perception of themselves will, at least to a certain extent, be based on the values of the society in which they live. There is no doubt that fit and energetic people are held in higher esteem than inactive and "lazy" individuals, which is likely to result in someone not participating and

having a lower feeling of self-worth than someone who is sporty. The perception of laziness will be returned to in the findings chapter.

It has to be noted that there are some problems associated with the participation in sport. An example of this is Sherif's Robber's Cave experiment where adolescents became overly competitive and they manifested their failures in aggressive behaviour (Kassin et al., 2011). The hostility ceased when the teams had an overarching goal. Notwithstanding this, sport has been shown to have positive effects (Putnam, 1995; Ussher, Owen, Cook, & Whincup, 2007) including increased psychological wellbeing (Shin & You, 2013).

Bottrell and Armstrong (2007) explain that the transition period will be different depending upon the young person's social class, their gender and culture. Māori and Pacific Peoples are more likely to have lower academic qualifications (Bibbee, 2013). Both these cultures also tend to have less social capital that can be used to help secure employment. The employment that the young person chooses (or ends up in) can also have a bearing on socio-economic status (West & Newton, 1983).

There is a developmental component to the transition between school and training or work. Martinez et al. (2012) cite Erikson whose work identified that a teenager has to overcome the insecurities that are so often part of the adolescent years. One of the predictors of making a successful transition is being motivated and having the feeling of being able to determine one's own future (De Ridder, Van Aken, Van der Lippe, & Baay, 2014). Schneider (2009) agrees and adds that if a person is ambitious, then the transition is likely to be smooth. This may be a reasonable assertion but, as Bibbee (2013) explains, Māori tend to have lower

academic achievement than non-Māori and this has been shown to be the single biggest predictor of unemployment and reduced opportunities. These disparities will have to be overcome to ensure that all young people have the same amount of belief that if they are motivated, they can succeed.

There will be many factors that determine the ease and success with which an adolescent begins to move away from the school environment to either further education, training or the workplace. Having academic qualifications that enable the student to select further education will be an advantage but there are many other variables that will impact on the young person. If for example, the adolescent chooses for whatever reason to remain in their home town, it will be important that the town can help provide a pathway for future employment. The literature demonstrates that participation in, particularly, team sports is beneficial to wellbeing during this transition time.

### **Investment in the transition period**

When considering adolescents, it is suggested that their concern for their future careers will have an influence on their wellbeing. Although success will depend to a large extent on the young person's school leaving achievement, as alluded to in the preceding section, all young people have to know that their hard work will pay off and that there is a future for them.

Bibbee (2013) suggests New Zealand is one of the more successful OECD countries in terms of how the young transition into work. She notes though that the range of achievement is wide, and there is quite a large group of youth that leave with no job-ready skills and tend to remain unemployed or with limited employment opportunities. MP Colin King suggests that New Zealand needs to

double the availability of apprentice training opportunities and that more employers need to offer training places, as only about a fifth of the employers are taking on an inexperienced worker (Bell, 2012).

Dalziel (2013) explains that New Zealand has a long term shortage of various trades and Māori and Pacific Peoples are particularly adversely affected by unemployment and a lack of bankable skills. He suggests that if the education system was attuned to the needs of business, many of these issues could be resolved. Dalziel explains that some progress may be being made with a review underway at that time but that the ‘vocational pathways’ (p.190) may be less appealing to young people because attainment in the unit standards is only a pass or fail, rather than further gradations of merit of high achievement. Interestingly, one of the sites of the research project, Otorohanga, has been discussed in the media since, rather than increasing opportunities for youth in Otorohanga, funding is going to be directed at “at risk” 16 and 17 year olds (Carson & Gardner, 2012). It would appear that since Otorohanga currently has youth that are not deemed vulnerable and their social indicators are good due to the town’s efforts and cohesion, funding will be diverted to areas with higher need. Since there are a higher proportion of Māori in Otorohanga and the surrounding district than nationally, this appears to be a retrograde step if the overarching intention is to increase the opportunities available so that all young New Zealanders know that, with application, they can find a career pathway that leads to meaningful employment.

### **The demographic dividend.**

Jackson (2011) argues that since the Māori population has a very much younger median age than non-Māori in New Zealand, it is important to take

advantage of this and invest in young Māori who have, up to now, been disproportionately affected by lack of work skills. As stated earlier, Bibbee's (2013) research concluded that Maori do tend to have lower academic outcomes than non-Maori which then results in fewer career opportunities. A "demographic window" (p. 66) is created when a sector of the population has more young people than old people and the main high earners are moving out of employment (Jackson, 2011). As Ogawa, Chawla, and Matsukura (2009) explain the periods will pass as the cohort in this window ages but because it is based on birth rates at any particular time in relation to the rest of the population, can be pinpointed once those children are born. The key is using the information to provide training so that that cohort can be used to the country's advantage globally. Whilst Kelly (2003) makes the important comment that youth are the most valuable resource, Bibbee's 2013 research reveals that Māori "may also face implicit discrimination" (p.11) within New Zealand. It will be vital to invest in Māori youth to ensure their full potential is reached – not only for the youth and the region but for the country as a whole.

### **Psychological aspects of adolescence**

There are a number of psychological aspects that may have a bearing on an adolescent's wellbeing. Some of these factors will be influenced by the many biological changes that are occurring during the period of adolescence. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the biological factors in any detail but risk-taking has a physiological and biological basis and will be discussed briefly. Other major influences on wellbeing are the search for self-identity and the adolescent's temperament. These will be discussed in the middle part of this

section. One of the psychological protective factors is resilience and some brief comparison of the literature will conclude this section.

Adolescence is also a time when there is a growing awareness of self-identity and choices made during this time will be based on the young person's sense of themselves (West & Newton, 1983). With the uncertainties and changes that are taking place which affect young people as they move away from the comparative stability of the school environment, developing a sense of self or self-identity, can be an important task (Bauman & Vecchi, 2004).

Call (1996) explains that as adolescents are approaching adulthood, they are in a process of formulating their adult sense of self. This sense of themselves will have a bearing on how they behave. Encouraging young people to be helpful and prosocial has a significant effect on their feelings about themselves. The process for this will be that they learn skills, their actions are endorsed and they get recognition for having achieved, and this feeds back into their self-image and increases their self-esteem. Call (1996) explains that this process often takes place in a social setting and can be reinforced with positive relationships. On the other hand, using threats to try to reduce negative behaviours is shown to be counter-productive and reduces the chance that the youth will rise and overcome a challenge.

Temperament, which is fairly static, is associated with subjective wellbeing whereas personality traits may not remain stable throughout a person's life (Viñas et al., 2014). Wellbeing is correlated with the temperamental factors of self-control to become active, affiliation, activity level, attention and restraint. There may be some confounders in that achieving goals (because of, for example,

attention level) has the effect of creating a higher sense of wellbeing. However it is also important to not restrict any evaluation to personality traits, characteristics or temperament; it is vital to also consider the social context in which that person is living (Bottrell, 2009a) and has learnt behaviours.

One of the protective characteristics that a person can develop to help them through difficulty is resilience. This is a strength which can be gained when a person experiences adversity and yet needs to function despite the difficulties (Bottrell, 2009a). Personality and life experiences will influence how well a person can cope with difficulty (Frydenberg, 2008). Resiliency not only has psychological benefits but appears to have an impact on a person's physiology too. A higher sense of wellbeing has been shown to help make a person less likely to catch a cold and if they do get unwell, tend to recover sooner than someone with a lower sense of wellbeing (Rablen, 2012). Hodgetts et al. (2010) explain that the connection provided by well-functioning communities is associated with increased resilience. This ability to withstand adversity may be at both group and individual level.

Although resiliency can act as a protective factor, it does not mean that the risk factor has dissipated (Small & Memmo, 2004). Rablen (2012) explains people have the capacity to become accustomed to change, and this has been demonstrated when people have to adapt to the outcomes of major events in their lives. However, there are some things that research has shown people never become accustomed to and one of those is unemployment (Rablen, 2012). This has particular relevance to this study as if a young person, for whatever reason, does not become meaningfully employed, it will affect their sense of wellbeing.

Risk taking is associated with adolescence but it may be more than experimentation and a bid for independence. It may be a biological process which occurs during development. As Bainbridge and Neufeld (2009) explain, pleasurable feelings are produced by dopamine. They explain that when a person is considering whether or not to do something that can be a threat to their wellbeing, they will experience feelings of risk when deciding if the gamble is going to pay off and give them reward. The adult will usually have some restraint which will allow them to determine if the risk is worth taking. The adolescent is very much more vulnerable to the potential reward that comes from having done something risky. There are several reasons for this. There appears to be a shift in the dopamine-producing process during adolescence which results in an adolescent having less ability to use restraint than an adult. Another factor is that there appears to be an increased desire for dopamine and thus more requirement to seek out pleasurable sensations. The other major problem is that during adolescence the frontal cortex where consequences and judgement will be made are not fully developed. It should be noted that children are also very vulnerable to risks but usually they are being protected from those hazards by carers.

A further aspect that is relevant to the current study is that resilience and some risk-taking behaviours are a life stage and what is normal behaviour amongst one community may be risky or outside the norm in another (Bottrell, 2009b). Bottrell explains that some resilience research in higher deprivation settings has removed the environment from the measurement but that means that the context of the social setting is ignored. Bottrell (2009b) quotes Felner (2006) who has considered the different levels of society and how they interact and that the “different settings and contexts mutually influence the construction of

transactions” (Bottrell, 2009b, p.325). She explains that most people who experience difficult circumstances learn to work with their circumstances, adapt to them for the preservation of their own social identities and self-esteem (Bottrell, 2007) and mature into fully functioning adults.

Bottrell (2009b) explains that resilience theories have tended to consider the individual and the risks for that person. However, there may be a collective resilience available to communities that have the ability and insight, as well as strength to create some coping mechanisms. Bottrell (2009b) cites Felner’s 2006 transactional-ecological framework which recognises the micro, meso and macro settings in which all interaction takes place. This model acknowledges the dynamics of the interactions and how the many contexts will all have a bearing on the individual. An example at its most simple level is an individual who may be coping with some adverse situations such as being treated in a demeaning way by the authorities. They are likely to have interaction with others experiencing the same difficulty and collectively they may create some resilience to that potential damage to their self-esteem.

During the adolescent period, there are a number of factors that can affect sense of wellbeing. Some of these will be part of the development process but others will be dependent upon the temperament of the individual and their environment. The ability to overcome adversity, resilience, will help increase mental, as well as physical wellbeing. Having a sense of community-mindedness and knowing that the community cares about a person, increases wellbeing too.

### **Neoliberalism and wellbeing**

Neoliberalism, or a free market, is the dominant political and economic ideology in most developed and developing countries. The model includes minimal government intervention, which is intended to allow the population to strive for success and flourish under competition (Whitham, 2012). Neoliberalism aligns well with capitalism and operates within a global setting. New Zealand has had the most rapid adaptation to neoliberalism of all countries when it changed stance in the 1980s (Rashbrooke, 2013b).

Neoliberalism has been immensely beneficial to some people but has resulted in an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor (Rashbrooke, 2013b). Part of neoliberal policy is to withdraw subsidies for local industry and to remove the taxes on imported goods to allow free and competitive trade. It does mean though that the industries that would, in previous generations, have employed local unskilled or semi-skilled workers, will relocate if they find that a cheaper labour force and more profitable industrial conditions exist elsewhere (Poata-Smith, 2013; Rashbrooke, 2013a).

The relevance of neoliberalism in this project is that it can have a bearing on an adolescent's path between childhood and adulthood. How adolescents are regarded will, at least to a certain degree, determine how social policy is formulated that will directly affect the transition period. Kelly (2003) explains that, in some communities, it is a time when people are mistrusted. He goes on to suggest that government is tending to manage this sector of the population and, one of the ways of doing this, is by defining normal and abnormal behaviour. Electronic advances allow for constant surveillance but they also play into the neoliberal framework. Ideal adults with preferred futures can be brought into

general discourse (Kelly, 2003). The issue is that everyone in society is expected to contribute to the economy (Bottrell, 2009b).

Another relevant aspect of neoliberalism is that there is a perception that a young person can follow their chosen career path and the opportunity for success is entirely their responsibility (Bottrell, 2009a). External factors such as the socio-economic environment where, for example, a young person cannot find stable work, becomes individualised and the failing belongs to that unemployed person (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2007; Whitham, 2012).

Putnam et al. (2004) explains that public policy is so often designed to restrict the development of social capital. Neoliberalism, which encourages a strong sense of personal responsibility, does not rely on the organic network. In contrast to this concept of everyone for themselves, and unregulated competition amongst individuals, an interlinked community that functions as an organic unit can have power. Hodgetts et al. (2010) explain that this can help to resist negative influences through “collective efficacy” (p.314).

The reason why some of the literature about free market economics has been reviewed is because it will have such a bearing on the adolescent as they look towards adulthood. There is no doubt that the pathway ahead can affect all young people. For those who plan to go to university, there can be the constraints of funds, and the conditions of student loans. For those who plan to enter a trade there may be limited options available through apprenticeships, but those adolescents without a clear pathway ahead are likely to be most adversely affected and thus have the biggest threat to their wellbeing. With the emphasis on the

success of the individual, it only serves to highlight perceived/real inadequacies when those young people do not manage to move straight into paid employment.

## **Chapter Three: Method**

This chapter details the methods used in this research project to gain information to help answer the research question. The first section explains the research question and why this topic was selected. The second section sets out the research methods used for this project and the theoretical assumptions will be presented. The methods of data collection will then be stated and this section will conclude with why those particular questions were asked to elicit the information. There will then be an explanation of why the particular sites were selected for the project. The penultimate section in this chapter will set out how the data analysis was structured and how the various themes were identified. The ethics approval and confidentiality issues will then be presented as the final section in this chapter

### **The research question**

As mentioned in the first chapter, the primary research aim is exploring rural young people's perceptions of community factors involved in their wellbeing.

Young people are often construed as problematic, responsible for nuisance behaviours, and/or at risk of causing harm to their communities and themselves (Bottrell, 2009b). How those adolescents are perceived and how they are treated may have a bearing on their behaviour, attitude, motivation and sense of wellbeing, sense of acceptance and self-esteem.

This topic was selected to consider what community factors can help the navigation of the period from adolescence to adult. It is likely that most adolescents need support to do so (Becroft, 2009; McCreanor & Watson, 2004) and that help will come from a variety of sources. This research will consider those sources and whether sense of community can affect that support.

### **Research methodology**

Qualitative methods have been used almost exclusively throughout this research project. The reason for seeking qualitative data was because this provides an opportunity to gain an understanding of the participants' opinions at a deeper level than might be achieved through other data collection methods such as with a list of pre-determined questions in a survey. Using a qualitative approach has also allowed the researcher to gain an understanding from the participants' perspective (Howard, 1985), has provided the opportunity for the researcher to modify the questions as other information became available and to seek further clarification when it was required.

Quantitative data has been obtained to provide context. This was obtained from the census of population for 2001, 2006 and 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a).

### **Research design**

The primary method of data collection was through four focus groups with final year high school students. Two groups of students from each town's high school were asked their opinions of the town, how much they felt they were respected by the community and about their plans for when they leave school. Similar open ended questions were asked of each group. Most of the questions focussed on the positive aspects of the students' lives – what they liked about their town, and about community events, but there were a few questions that sought information about potentially more negative areas. These questions included whether the adolescents felt safe in their town, and, if the student had a problem, would they have someone they could talk to about the issue.

The only preselection criterion was that the students were 17 years old or more. They were all in their last year of senior school and whilst they were not

specially selected, would, in all likelihood, be representative of higher achievers because they had remained in school until the point where they could attain university entrance. Small and Memmo (2004) suggest that using a prosocial approach is helpful. Rather than focussing on risk factors, the research is based on normal development and well-functioning adolescents and is thus more likely to be generalizable. The alternative, using a deficit model, focuses on risk taking behaviours of adolescents who may be especially vulnerable.

Supporting and background information was obtained through in-depth interviews with members of each community. These interviewees were selected because of their knowledge of the town and/or their experience working with young people in their town.

### **Epistemology and interpretative assumption**

This project has relied on qualitative data to answer the research questions. The dataset has captured the psychosocial experiences of the participants and will have most meaning if the researcher assumes that each participant has their own meaning of the constructs used. Further, these meanings may be shared amongst the other participants, or they may have different meaning to each participant and all these meanings may or may not be the same as those understood by the researcher. The philosophical stance that was used in order to be able to understand the subjective data and interpret it in such a way as to make it manageable to discuss was a social constructivism framework.

The data was collected by a series of focus groups and interviews with townspeople and then analysed using social constructionism. (Social constructionism and social constructivism are closely related and for the purposes of this chapter will be used interchangeably as an epistemological perspective.

Social construction is a separate, though related, topic about how people place meaning on social issues and will be discussed in a subsection below). Social constructivism is an appropriate means of interpreting the data collected through focus groups as it allows for the participant's interpretation of the construct to be the understood meaning (Liamputtong, 2011). Curtis and Curtis (2011) suggest that, through this perspective, the interaction between researcher and participants becomes less of a question and answer session and more of a discussion about the shared meanings of the constructs.

The reason why social constructivism has been selected is because it relies on people making their own meaning of all the interactions or stimuli within the social world. There are no absolute truths but that, in itself, is the framework with which the interpretation is made.

### **Social construction**

The participants provided their opinions on the various points raised during the focus groups and interviews. There can be, and were, differing points of view. As human beings, we have the ability to interpret an issue according to a selection of reference points. These include previous information we have interpreted, how others interpret the stimuli, empirical evidence, and possibly how much importance we place on a particular issue. Social constructivism is the theoretical basis which allows for a wide range of interpretation of a particular social phenomenon (Harris & Best, 2013).

Harris (2013) states "It is the process of calling attention to a troubling condition, not the condition itself, that makes something a social problem" (p.3). There are a variety of different viewpoints of a situation. For example, Harris

(2013) uses the example of migration. If we consider it in the New Zealand context, increasing the population is one of the current goals as it will create more economy of scale in a country that has a very small population. It can be interpreted as foreigners taking jobs from New Zealanders or any number of other ways – good or bad. If we were to use the positivist framework, we would count the number of people who have come to New Zealand and possibly how many New Zealanders have left the country to get an estimate.

Someone who makes an interpretation, cannot say with certainty that their viewpoint is accurate. That is not to say that the object under consideration does not exist – it will be very real but the constructionist framework provides a theoretical reason for the variety of opinions (Harris, 2013). Harris explains that this perspective can be unethical or lacking in values because within the various constructions, some may not apportion blame or accountability for a repugnant act (Harris & Best, 2013). Weinberg (2014) suggests that this perspective is particularly strong in finding solutions to social issues and has a scientific basis that is often overlooked by those scientists that rely on empirical methods of research.

The chapter presenting the findings does refer to social construction to explain that there may be differing opinions on the size of a social problem. For example, some participants focussed on a particular issue affecting the youth population of their town and other participants did not recognise that there was any issue. The phenomenon will have different meaning and relevance for different people.

### **Primary data collection**

The qualitative data which was collected in order to answer the research questions was obtained through two main methods. These were focus groups with students and in-depth interviews with adult community members.

<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>Te Aroha</b>	<b>Otorohanga</b>
Focus group male students	Four participants	Eight participants
Focus group female students	Six participants	Seven participants
Community members in-depth interviews	Three	Two
Community members short interviews	One	One

#### **Focus groups.**

Focus groups are a useful means of gaining information particularly when there is little empirical data about the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These focus groups were used to gain the opinions of young people about their town and if they feel that they have a part to play in it.

The initial approach to each college was made by phone call to the colleges asking if the researcher may send a letter to the Principals. One principal agreed immediately to the proposal and met with the researcher and a senior member of staff to finalise dates. This senior member of staff was then appointed as the liaison. The other college's principal asked a senior member of staff to make contact with the researcher. The researcher met with that senior member of staff to explain more about the project and set the dates of the focus groups. The researcher did not have any initial discussion with the Principal of the second college but had an opportunity to meet at a later stage.

#### **Recruitment process for focus group participants.**

Members of both colleges offered to advertise the research project and arrange for flyers to be placed on noticeboard within the two schools and on the

electronic daily newsletters which is sent to all pupils. The participant recruitment flyer is attached as Appendix Three. The flyer included:

- an age requirement of 17 years or older;
- a brief outline of the project;
- what would be required of the students;
- an assurance of anonymity;
- that any student can withdraw at any stage;
- notification that a \$20 voucher would be given to every participant irrespective of whether or not they withdrew before the end of the focus group discussion.

The students then contacted the researcher to signal their interest. This meant that the participants were neither handpicked nor would they feel under any obligation to the college to take part.

Potential participants were emailed a Participant Information sheet (Appendix Four) which gave clear information about the intent of the project and what would be expected of them. They were also sent a copy of the consent form (Appendix Six).

They were informed before the focus group that they could withdraw at any stage and were reminded of this before the recording began on the day of the meeting. The students were all given the opportunity to ask any questions and they were all given contact details of the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee in case they had any questions about the ethical conduct of the researcher.

The students were informed that the focus groups would be audio-recorded and that they would be sent a summary of the discussion. They would then have two weeks to advise of any deletions that they would like made.

The focus groups were all held at the respective schools in a room that had been allocated by the contact member of staff. Only the students and researcher were in the room during the discussions. A total of four focus groups were conducted with two groups from each college. The number of participants ranged from four to eight. All the students were in their final year of secondary school and were 17 years or older. No other demographic information was specifically sought although some of the participants from Otorohanga provided responses which indicate that they are Māori.

The students were divided into two groups according to their gender. They were advised at the time that there would be no gender-specific questions. This allowed the researcher to gain two different groups of responses which, as will be discussed later, did have differences.

The students were all sent, ahead of the day of the focus group, a list of the questions that would be asked. The questions were:

- \*What do you think are some of the good things and some of the negatives of living in Otorohanga?
- Do you see people in town that you or your family know? What do you think about that?
- Do you think it makes a difference to how you feel about Otorohanga from the way you are treated in shops?
- \*Do any of you hold a particular role in the school (such as captain of the rugby team)?
- What do you think about the types of things like community events that are held in Otorohanga?

- \*If you had a problem, do you know an adult that you would feel okay talking to them about it as you know they could help you?
- Can you tell me what you think about Otorohanga and whether it is really interested in the young people?
- Tell me about what it is like to be a young person living in Otorohanga. (the sorts of things - do you feel safe, are there enough things to do, if you had a problem would you know where to seek help, do you think the library has enough books, anything you like).
- Tell me about the types of activities that youth enjoy having in town. Is there anything that you have heard about in another town that you would like here?
- \*Do you have a planned career and, if so, what do you hope to do?
- \*If you are doing further education, will you do it here or in another centre?
- \*If you move away, do you see a time when you may return to your town?

The questions marked with an asterisk were asked of each participant in turn although it was also emphasised that students were welcome to state that they did not wish to answer a question. All four groups were asked the same questions and each participant was given time to contribute to the discussion. The focus groups were all held at the colleges and lasted for approximately one hour each. There is the potential risk that the students might have felt uncomfortable in the school setting and there is no doubt that any member of the school community could have seen who entered or left the meeting room but no one except for the participants and the researcher knew which participant said what.

### **Interviews with community members.**

Five in-depth interviews were with adult members of the community. As Curtis and Curtis (2011) suggest, it is important to recruit “strategically” (p.36). For this reason, participants were invited from a purposive sample from both regional towns. Two of the community member participants were selected from a Google search using the name of the town and “community” and “youth” as the search criteria. They both work in the area of youth development within their towns. One other participant, a Community Board member, was suggested by the local Council as she had had a long association with the town and its youth. A member of a government social agency was also interviewed - the researcher gained the name of this interviewee through the Hamilton branch of the same agency as he could provide insight into the Māori community and provide background information. The fifth community member was suggested by one of the other interviewees as a longstanding representative of the community. All agreed to take part in the research project and were sent the Participant Information sheet and a copy of the consent form.

All these interviews were semi-structured, in-depth interviews and the following discussion topics were raised or open-ended questions asked:

- to give an overview of his/her role in the community
- what sort of situations he/she generally meets the young people of the town
- his/her perception of young people in the town
- if you have noticed any general changes over the years in the young people’s attitudes – such as whether they wish to stay in the town or

move on; if youth seem to have more/less aspirations; generally feel that they have a place in the community

- if he/she were one of those students, how do you think you would feel.
- does he/she think that young people contribute to society in the town and, if so, how?
- does he/she think that youth are valued and respected?

Four of the interviews took place at the community member's office and the fifth took place at the researcher's home in Hamilton. All the interviews lasted a maximum of one hour.

Two further interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and were less formal. One of these was with the manager of a shop in one of the regional towns. The manager was phoned to ask if he would be prepared to have a short meeting with the researcher. On the day of the meeting, he was asked to sign the consent form. The interview took the form of the manager giving an overview of their recruitment policy in relation to part time staff and their contribution to the local community. This interview took place in the manager's office within the shop and lasted 30 minutes.

The other was a half-hour interview which was conducted by telephone. This interviewee was purposefully sought by contacting a social agency within the town to ask who may be prepared to be interviewed as a long-standing resident and to provide a Māori perspective of the community. The agency contacted the person they thought would be most appropriate and then passed on the contact phone number. This community member was then contacted and agreed to be interviewed by phone. This interviewee provided rich detail in the form of the current situation but also historical information. This last interviewee did not sign

a consent form but the intentions of the project were made clear and the interviewee did not require her comments to be anonymised.

### **Rationale for a prosocial approach.**

Throughout the data collection, the emphasis has been on seeking out information about positive aspects of living in a small regional town. The researcher has sought to understand the positive environment that many young people experience, and contribute to. Small and Memmo (2004) suggest that using a positive approach may be useful as then all youth can be included whereas focussing on risk and deficit, tends to target those adolescents who are especially vulnerable. The normative development approach not only considers functioning social interactions but uses them as the prosocial model or point of reference (Small & Memmo, 2004).

### **Secondary data sources**

Secondary quantitative data was also used for provide further context and supporting information. The census data for the resident populations in 2006 and 2013 for Te Aroha and Otorohanga (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a) was retrieved in order to learn the ethnicity and age distributions.

A second dataset was retrieved from Statistics New Zealand. This was the highest qualification by ethnicity for the usually-resident population count aged 15 years and over in Te Aroha and Otorohanga for the 2006 and 2013 censuses. It was used to determine any differences in training/tertiary education outcome over the seven years.

### **Justification for using the two towns**

Two sites were used for the data collection. Two were selected so that there would be opportunity for comparison of any phenomena that were revealed.

The first site, Otorohanga, was selected as a possible location because various social indicators suggest (for example Kaipuke Consultants (2012)) that it is performing well, and various newspaper articles (such as Bone (2012) report on the measures which have been implemented to eradicate social problems. These articles explain how the young people are encouraged to be in either education or employment.

The Education Review Office's reports were retrieved for other Waikato regional towns. The town that has a college most closely aligned to Otorohanga in terms of size of roll, and that has only one senior college, is Te Aroha. Te Aroha and Otorohanga are also similar distances from Hamilton and their next nearest town (Morrinsville and Te Awamutu respectively). There are also some differences which were considered, as they might skew the data. As shown below, one of those is the distribution of the students' ethnicities. However, on balance, the two towns appeared to be comparative.

**Table 1. Ethnic composition of Te Aroha and Otorohanga Colleges.**

Ethnicity	Otorohanga College (Education Review Office, 2013a)	Te Aroha College (Education Review Office, 2013b)
NZ European	43%	71%
Māori	53%	16%
Pacific	2%	
Asian	1%	6%
Other European	1%	4%
Other		3%

Te Aroha College has a roll of 360 day students and Otorohanga has a total roll of 340. Otorohanga has a boarding facility, Falloon House, which can accommodate up to 60 students. The boarders stay over from Monday morning and return to their homes in Taharoa, Kawhia, Marokopa and the surrounding

areas on the Friday afternoon. Whilst both Otorohanga and Te Aroha are fairly comparable in that they are both smallish regional towns, Otorohanga has fewer residents than Te Aroha (just over 2500 and nearly 4000 respectively). However, Otorohanga has a higher percentage of youth under 15 years than Te Aroha (22% and 18% respectively). A broader overview of each town is provided in Chapter Four.

### **Data analysis**

Analytical induction was used to find key themes that arose from the various interviews and focus groups. As Curtis and Curtis (2011) explain, this method of thematic analysis will ensure that the ideas develop from the participants' opinions and feelings rather than seeking out information that "fits" a particular theme.

#### **Focus groups.**

All the focus group discussions were recorded on a voice recorder and the researcher transcribed the discussions. No names were assigned to any of the comments that were made in the transcription.

The focus groups' transcriptions were analysed with the use of a theme column next to the full transcript and concepts were noted using open coding. Examples of these themes were "sport" and "feeling of security". The use of open coding facilitated the identification of themes that could then be grouped (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). These categories then formed the basis of a summary of the focus group discussion. There were some headings that were common to all four summaries but other categories were developed specific to what was raised by the participants. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the summaries were then sent to the participants. The summaries included a selection of quotations. None of the

quotations were assigned to any of the participants (please see page 73 for use of names in final report).

The themes identified through the open coding were further analysed and compared with the literature and are presented in Chapter Five as the Findings and Discussion.

### **In depth Interviews.**

The in-depth interviews with the community members were audio-recorded. A full transcription was sent by email to the community member for their approval and they were invited to make any changes or advise of any further information that they would like included. The community members were asked to respond within two weeks.

The same process of open coding was used for these transcripts as the researcher did not want to be constrained by solely using the themes that had been identified from the focus groups. There were common themes but the researcher believed it was important to gain background information for the study as well as learning about how the adult members of the community viewed topics that had been discussed during the focus groups.

### **Ethics Committee approval**

A proposal explaining the project was approved by the University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics Committee. The researcher gained approval from both principals to conduct the research with students at their schools.

In order to avoid requiring parental consent, students were required to already have attained their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was confirmed with all participants before the focus groups began.

### **Safety of participants**

Although the focus group participants were comparatively young, the topic was not likely to elicit highly sensitive discussion as the questions were not deeply personal.

The researcher stated at the beginning of the session what the planned parameters of the discussion would be and thus had a reference point to return to should the conversation take an unhealthy turn. The students were informed that questions would be asked that were primarily about positive aspects of their town; that the discussion was not about individual people but about the community in general; and if the conversation was going to focus on more negative aspects, the participant would be given time to finish the point being made but then the next question would be asked. As it was, all the students understood the nature of the conversation and there were no problems.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

The students were all notified through the Participant Information sheet that all the material used in the thesis would be anonymised. The members of each group were also asked to not discuss what had been said within the discussion in order to respect everyone's opinions. The summaries do not have any names on them and when quotations are used, a gender-appropriate pseudonym and the town was used (e.g. Emily, Otorohanga).

The community members were also given clear information about the intent of the project and what was expected of them. They were sent a copy of the

Informed Consent form ahead of the scheduled meeting and advised that the interview would be recorded. The community members were all given opportunity to ask any questions and they were all given contact details of the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee in case they had any questions about the ethical conduct of the researcher.

The community members were all notified through the Participant Information sheet and Informed Consent form that they had the choice of whether or not they wished to have their name and role stated in the final report. It was explained clearly that if they chose the latter, there was no guarantee that they will be entirely non-identifiable due to the size of the towns and that they are well-known members of those communities. This was reiterated to each community member before the interview began.

The community members were all sent a transcript of their interviews in editable word format and then invited to make any changes. The interviewees were advised that they could add, delete or amend anything within the transcript and then, once he/she was satisfied with the record, to return it as the final version.

### **Acknowledgement of participation**

All the students were given a \$20 gift voucher for The Warehouse for participating in the research project. They were all informed that they were welcome to leave the group at any stage and they would still receive the voucher.

## Chapter Four: Overview of the two towns

This chapter provides an overview of the two towns which were the sites of the research project. There are a number of similarities about the towns in that they are both service towns for the farming industry, have a variety of discrete manufacturing and farming corporations and are tourist destinations. Both towns have capitalised on their outstanding topographical features for the benefit of the town. Otorohanga is the closest town to the popular Waitomo Caves and has also developed itself as the “Kiwiana” town. Te Aroha has its mountain, the mineral spas and hot springs, and has recently been joined to the Hauraki rail trail. They are also a similar distance from the main urban centre, Hamilton, and have other regional towns within a twenty minute drive.

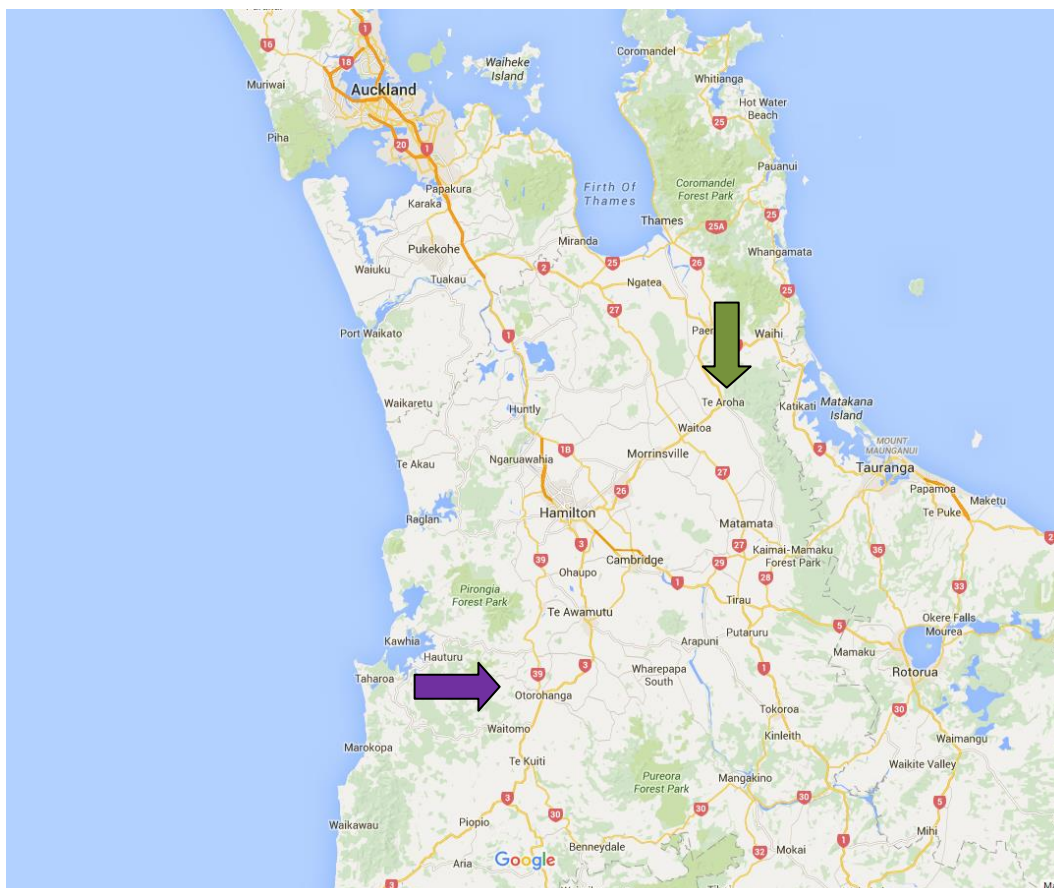


Figure 1. Map of Waikato region.

## Te Aroha

Te Aroha is a town with just over 3,900 residents (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a). Over 26.6% of the town's population is 65 years or older which is a considerably larger percentage than the general distribution in the Waikato of 12.4% (Statistics New Zealand, 2015c). Te Aroha also has over 18% of the resident population aged under 15 years whereas the region as a whole has an under 15 year old population of 22.9% (Statistics New Zealand, 2015c).

**Table 2. Te Aroha's population by ethnicity for the census of 2013 and 2006.**  
Source: (NZ Statistics, 2015). NB some residents identify with more than one ethnicity.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2013 census (% of town's population)</b>	<b>2006 census (% of town's population)</b>
European	3198 (82%)	2892 (77%)
Māori	618 (16%)	516 (14%)
Pacific Peoples	111 (3%)	66 (2%)
Asian	225 (6%)	174 (5%)
Other ethnicities not stated above	87 (2%)	399 (11%)
Not stated	126	102

As shown in Table 1, there has been an increase in the proportion of residents who identify themselves as European and a reduction in both Māori and Pacific Peoples. Tunitumi or Tui Pa marae has recently been reactivated and there is currently strong effort being made to encourage engagement with the marae and learn more about kaupapa (rules) Māori and kawa (protocols) and te reo (language). The marae is on the northern side of the town near the golf course. Some years ago several courses were offered through the marae including dressmaking, bricklaying and plumbing. Te Aroha is 51km from Hamilton, 34km from Matamata and 21km from Morrinsville, the latter being the other two towns in the tripartite Matamata-Piako District Council. Te Aroha is the smallest of the

three and has three Councillors as representatives rather than the other two towns' four representatives.

The town has a Little Theatre which stages productions regularly and there is a youth performing arts centre, Future Te Aroha. Te Aroha has primary care medical facilities including Te Korowai Hauora O Hauraki which incorporates holistic Māori practices and core values (Te Korowai Hauora O Hauraki, n.d.). There is a hospital which is run by the Te Aroha and District Health Services Charitable Trust and a dental practice.

Te Aroha has some large employers – Wallace Meats, Silver Fern Farms, Tatua Cooperative Dairy Company Limited, Inghams Enterprises and Fonterra Co-operative Group. The majority of the work is shift work and most of the factories are based out of town. There is also the Matamata-Piako District Council's head office in Te Aroha and a range of smaller employers. These include supermarkets, farming service industry companies, vehicle sales and vehicle maintenance, tourism, sports and leisure industry, retail, restaurants and fast food outlets. There are slightly higher percentages of technicians and trades' workers in Te Aroha than the rest of the Waikato region but there is a considerably higher percentage of labourers than the region as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a). Te Aroha has lost some of its large employers such as the Bendon factory, Inland Revenue and the Thames Valley Electric Power Board. For example, 98 jobs were lost when the Bendon factory closed in 1999 (Hunter, 2014) and, as a business owner in the town explained, most of that machinist work was done by women. The Matamata-Piako District which encompasses Te Aroha has a higher percentage of agricultural and fisheries work than New Zealand in

general (Baxendine, Cochrane, & Poot, 2005). Te Aroha has mineral spas, a natural soda water geyser and its beautiful mountain and is a popular tourist destination. Cycling and tramping routes in the hills above the town are well sign posted. Te Aroha is connected to Paeroa and on through the Karangahake Gorge by the Hauraki Rail Trail cycle path. Another attraction to the town, is the annual Cruise In where as many as 350 classic cars converge for a two day event (Waikato Times, 2015).

Te Aroha has several primary schools and one secondary school, Te Aroha College. Although there has been an increase from 60 to 81 young Māori (0 to 4 years old) in Te Aroha (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a), there is currently no kohanga reo (kindergarten where Māori culture, protocols and language are used) with the nearest being either in Paeroa or Morrinsville. Te Aroha College has a roll of approximately 360 day students. The college's achievement in NCEA Levels 1 and 2 are comparable with the national rates but as at 2013, the Level 3 rates were not yet at national rates. The other area where further work was identified was in ensuring the Māori students' outcomes are on a par with non-Māori (Education Review Office, 2013a). There are no tertiary education organisations in the town although there are some apprenticeship opportunities. In 2012 ten Te Aroha College students were being given work experience in local corporations and the community hospital (Preston, 2012). The initiative was intended to reduce the number of school leavers who did not have employment.

### **Otorohanga**

Otorohanga lies just under 60km south of Hamilton. The town has 2514 residents, a slight drop from 2628 residents in the 2001 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a). Over 18.5% of the town's population is 65 years or older which

is a larger percentage than the general distribution in the Waikato which is 12.4% (Statistics New Zealand, 2015c). Otorohanga also has a slightly smaller proportion of under 15 year olds to the rest of the Waikato - 22% compared with the region as a whole of 23%.

**Table 3. Otorohanga’s population by ethnicity for the census of 2013 and 2006.** (NZ Statistics, 2015).

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2013 census (% of town’s population)</b>	<b>2006 census (% of town’s population)</b>
European	1647 (66%)	1650 (64%)
Māori	960 (38%)	891 (34%)
Pacific Peoples	69 (3%)	36 (1%)
Asian	90 (4%)	66 (3%)
Other ethnicities not stated above	42 (2%)	237 (9%)
Not stated	93	63

The Kahotea Marae is located in Otorohanga and the tangata whenua are Ngāti Maniapoto (Te Potiki National Trust Limited, n.d.). Otorohanga developed the kiwi breeding site and first opened the Otorohanga Kiwi House to the public in 1971. The town has capitalised on this and has become the “Kiwiana” town using the much revered objects that symbolise New Zealand. The Waitomo Caves are about a 15 minute drive from Otorohanga.

Otorohanga has a medical centre and a dental practice. The nearest hospital is Te Kuiti Hospital which is one of the Waikato District Health Board’s rural community hospitals.

Otorohanga has some large employers including Giltrap AgriZone, Freight Lines Limited and McDonalds Lime. The Otorohanga District offices are based in Otorohanga. The town has had a major revival since the early 2000s when it was recognised that the local young people were not being employed locally and

yet there was a shortage of staff for industry. Otorohanga and the surrounding district, like Te Aroha, has a higher percentage of agricultural and fisheries workers than the overall New Zealand rate (Baxendine et al., 2005). Otorohanga had significant social issues in the early 2000s when there was an unemployment rate of 5.5% with the youth unemployment rate being considerably higher (Whitham, 2012). The Otorohanga Trade Training Centre was established and shortly afterwards the Waikato Institute for Technology (WINTEC) set up in the town. There is a range of other employers such as the supermarket, vehicle sales and vehicle maintenance, tourism, sports and leisure industry, retail, restaurants and fast food outlets including MacDonalDs. There has been a decrease in the number of Otorohanga residents who have no qualifications or Level 1 NCEA since the 2006 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2015b).

One of the community members explained that shortly after the Trade Training School was established, Otorohanga lost its biggest employer, Munro Caravans. This was 10 years ago as the company had been struggling to get young staff, and they made the decision to relocate. There was concern that this would destroy the burgeoning training centre. In fact there have been enough businesses to support the apprentices. The current mayor suggests that the existing programmes which provide training and work-ready skills need review particularly since the Ministry of Social Development has reduced the funding for these important preparatory courses (Waitomo News, 2015).

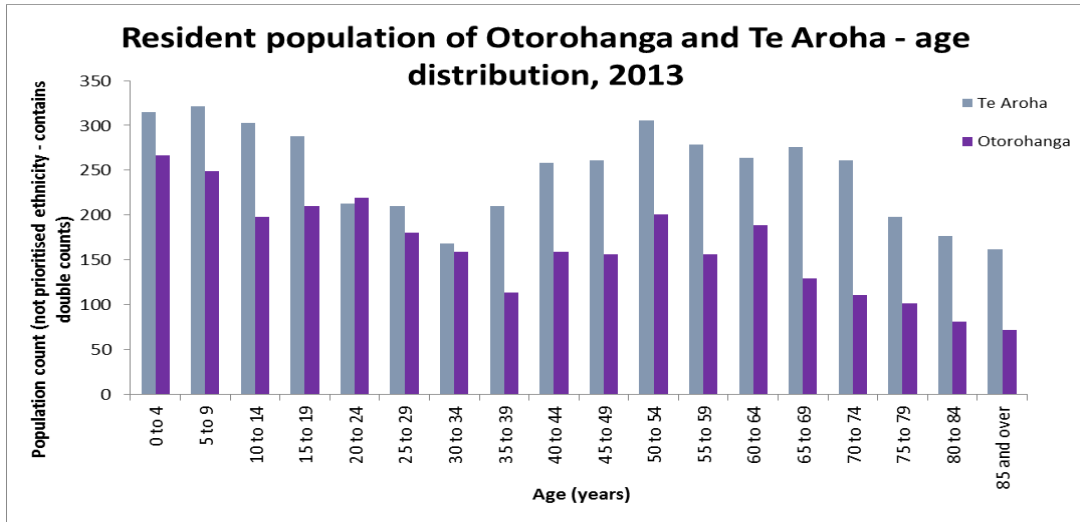
Otorohanga has a Development Board and the town advertises itself as a place where commercial ventures are encouraged (Otorohanga Business Development, n.d.). The town's motto is "Otorohanga – where kiwis can fly". As

Whitham explains, the global recession had little impact on the town and employment ranking for the region rose from 64<sup>th</sup> (out of 72 regions) to 17<sup>th</sup>.

Otorohanga has a kohanga reo. There are also several primary schools connected through the Primary Schools collective and one secondary school. The latter has a roll of approximately 340 students including some weekly boarders. The ethnicity distribution is 53% Māori and 43% NZ European, 2% Pacific Peoples, 1% Asian and other make up 1%. There is no differentiation between achievement in NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3 by Māori or non-Māori students. It is noted that the students may enter the school at below national levels but that they catch up during their time at the college. The Education Review Office (2013a) states that “Increased student participation and success in vocational, sporting and cultural pursuits are helping students to develop a greater sense of belonging and place in the school” (p.4). The Trade Training Centre, which is part of the Waikato Institute of Technology, offers a range of courses which will give the student the skills for entry-level work and help the student secure employment. The Trade Training Centre has strong links with the business community. As one of the interviewees explained, there is a strong demand for apprentices and students who have been through the pre-trades course.

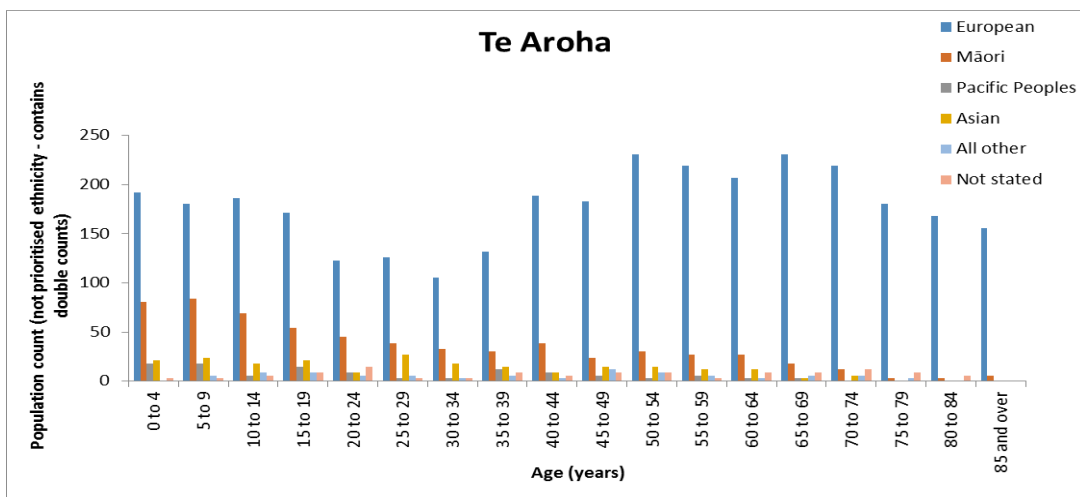
### **Ethnicity distributions**

Although Te Aroha has a comparatively larger population than Otorohanga, both towns’ populations are under 4,000 residents. Figure 2 shows the distribution of ages of the populations.



**Figure 2. Resident population of the two research towns – distribution by age.** (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a).

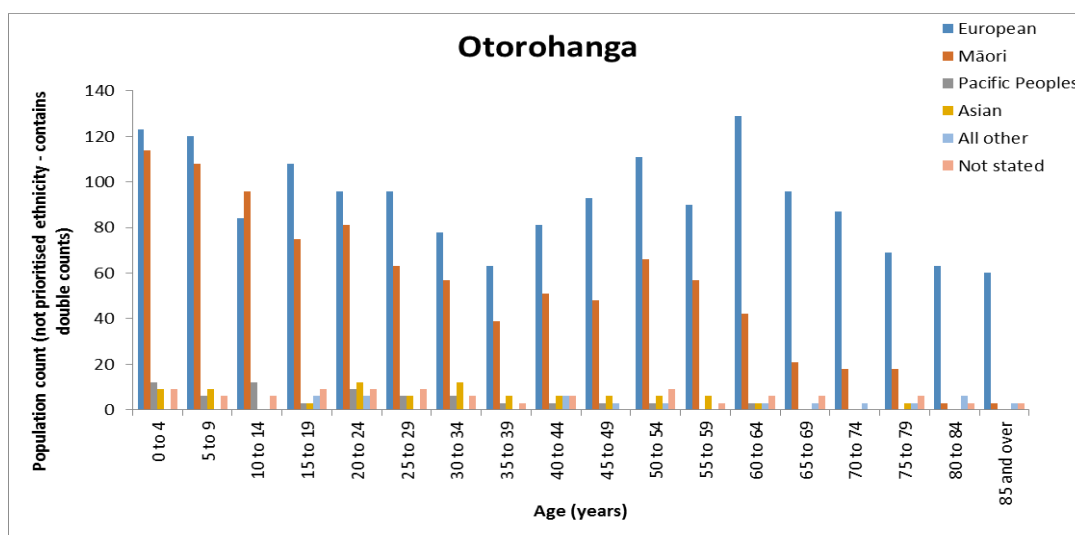
Figure 3 below shows the ethnicity distribution of Te Aroha. As can be seen, Te Aroha’s resident population identifies themselves predominantly as European. The Māori population has a positive skew in terms of age distribution and the European population is generally older. It is interesting that there are proportionally less young people in the age range 20 to 39 years.



**Figure 3. 2013 Census data - population by age and ethnicity in Te Aroha.** (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a).

Figure 4 shows the ethnicity distribution of Otorohanga. Comparison between Figures 3 and 4 show that the two towns’ populations by ethnicity differ

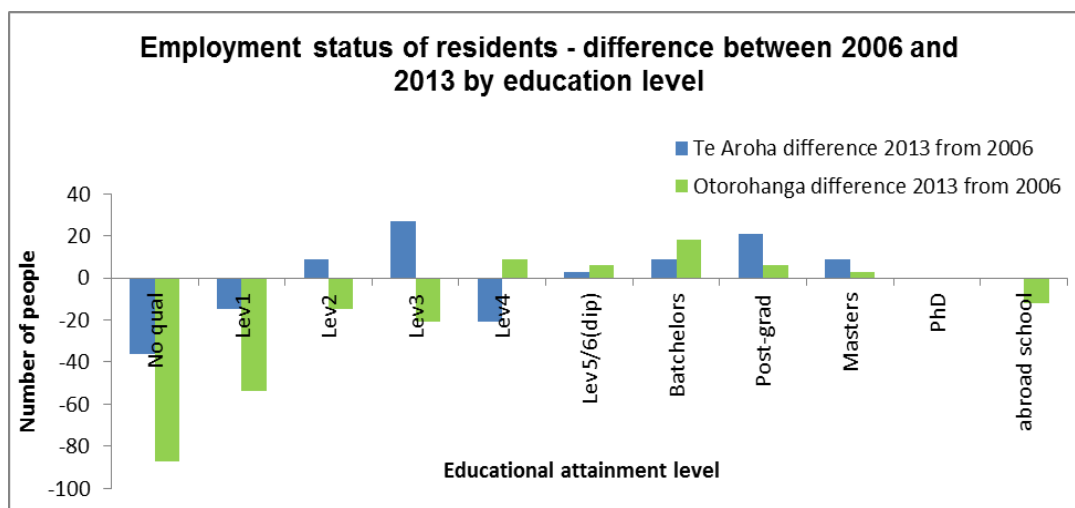
markedly. What is also noticeable is that the drop in the youth population is slightly later in the residents' lives in Otorohanga than in Te Aroha. It begins to dip at 20 years in Te Aroha and then rises again by 40 years old whereas in Otorohanga, there are less from 25 year (Māori) and 30 years (European) both increasing from about 40 years.



**Figure 4. 2013 Census data - population by age and ethnicity in Otorohanga.** (New Zealand Statistics, 2015a).

### **Increase in educational attainment levels**

As a postscript to the overview of the towns, census data reveals that the educational attainment levels of both towns increased between 2006 and 2013. Both towns' populations have had a reduction in the number of residents in employment with no qualifications or Level 1 qualifications.



**Figure 5. Difference in educational attainment for residents in employment in Te Aroha and Otorohanga between 2006 and 2013.** (Statistics New Zealand, 2015b).

### Summary of the comparison between the two towns

The two towns have some obvious similarities. They both provide support services to the farming community and, in particular, the dairy industry.

Although Te Aroha has a larger population than Otorohanga, the number of residents in each town in the age range 20 to 34 years is almost the same. This may be due to the fact that several of the large employers hire seasonal workers and so there is an influx of working age population to the town.

There is a very much higher proportion of residents who are Māori in Otorohanga than in Te Aroha. The Ministry of Education has recommended that Te Aroha College engage more with the Māori community. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, one community member in Te Aroha, suggested that with so few Māori in their town, it may be more difficult to gain a Māori voice. It is suggested that the extent to which Māori culture is embedded within the colleges and the community as a whole, is one of the current obvious dissimilarities between the towns.

New Zealand is towards the top of the rankings for education of youth but there is a very wide range of achievement with Māori and Pacific Peoples being predominantly at the lower end of educational achievement (Bibbee, 2013). It is noted that Māori students from Otorohanga College are achieving at the same level as their non-Māori cohort (Education Review Office, 2013a) whereas this is only being achieved at NCEA1 and 2 levels at Te Aroha College (Education Review Office, 2013b). The same Education Review Office report explains that there are some strategies which are intended to engage the Māori community in the town and to raise the level of Māori achievement within the college. Otorohanga College also manages to retain their students in school until they have reached the end of their secondary education. The principal of the college explained that the students have little interest in moving out of school early because the college brings the employers into the college effectively with work experience opportunities. Te Aroha have also identified some pathways to help young people transition into the workplace (Preston, 2012) and a community member explained that at least one corporation is still seeking apprentices.

Te Aroha and Otorohanga are approximately the same distance from Hamilton and it takes about 45 minutes to drive to Hamilton from either town. Both Te Aroha and Otorohanga have another town between them and Hamilton – Morrinsville and Te Awamutu respectively. Otorohanga students suggested that they are in a “very remote” place. There are limited options for public transport between Otorohanga and Hamilton but interestingly there are probably even less between Te Aroha and Hamilton since there is no passenger train service between Te Aroha and Hamilton.

Returning to the industry that exists in the two towns, they both have a range of businesses providing service to the local residents and commercial enterprises including the farming sector. Tourism is well established in both towns and, particularly in Te Aroha, offers guesthouse and bed and breakfast accommodation within the town centre. Both towns have national and international businesses operating out of the town. The large employers in Te Aroha employ shift and seasonal workers. The fact that the staff may be working outside the 'normal' business hours and that they may move to another seasonal employment location, might impact on how integrated these people are with the community as a whole. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five: Findings and discussion**

This chapter is divided into three main sections although there are overlaps between the topics discussed. The sections have, nevertheless, been grouped loosely around the findings. A selection of questions was asked of each group. These questions followed the same themes for all four focus groups but there was variation in how they were answered.

In Chapter Five, Part 1, the students' opinions about aspects of their towns are discussed. Part 2 presents the students' opinions of the topics that related primarily to their wellbeing. The final section, Part 3, contains the findings and discusses primarily the local factors associated with the adolescents' wellbeing, and how social capital can potentially ease the period as they begin to consider their futures.

### **Part 1. The students' opinions of their town and school**

#### **Sense of community**

Manis and Meltzer (1972) suggest that the traditional group that was a community is a historic relic and it would be untenable to re-create such a social grouping in today's world. Certainly, contemporary society in many countries operates in a neoliberal ideology and part of that ideology focuses on the individual. Nevertheless, cooperation between people helps clarify values, moderate behaviour, and helps to provide support in a variety of contexts and challenges (Manis & Meltzer, 1972). The students were asked what they like about their town and if they thought that their town had a sense of community.

All the students who took part in the focus groups think it is an enjoyable experience living in a fairly close-knit community. They explained that there is comfort and pleasure to be gained with everyone knowing everyone else and that

“it is a very friendly and close town” (Zack, Otorohanga) and “you can’t go anywhere and not see someone [you know]” (David, Te Aroha), and “we are all close, we are almost like family” (Aimee, Otorohanga).

Several of Otorohanga’s students expressed that there is a community enthusiasm to provide help. “One thing about Otorohanga is the sense of community. In Otorohanga if someone is in trouble, everyone will help”. (Aimee, Otorohanga). “Everyone will come together or give something even if it is the littlest thing, everybody’s giving” (Brianna, Otorohanga). The students explained that this type of community action brings everyone together and as an Otorohanga Community Board member commented of her town “it’s not exclusive – it’s an inclusive community”.

The female students in Te Aroha indicated that there is not complete community cohesion. For example, they made reference to a minority of the inhabitants of the town with differing values of behaviour. A student suggested there was the occasional situation where a person has “been brought up in an environment where they don’t care – I know people that don’t really mind if their parents find out [if they have done something wrong]”. The students commented on the town having some community events that attracted elderly people and that there was some reluctance by the students to participate in the same activities. “There’s a lot to do for others like art groups and things like that for seniors but it’s more of a senior town I feel” and this would suggest that there is limited community linkage.

The male students in Te Aroha also were of the opinion that there is division within the town with several distinct groups of people. The students explained there are those who are part of the community and are involved in town

life. Then there are people who live in Te Aroha but work elsewhere “so go to work early morning and come home late at night”. These people tend to not participate in community events much and probably came into the town rather than living in Te Aroha all their lives. The third main group is those who have come to the town and may have children, and through the children have made connection with other people in the town and participate in activities. The students did not expand upon which group shift workers tended to be part of but Te Aroha has a large percentage of its population working outside the ‘accepted’ daytime hours. Some of these shift workers are also not employed on a permanent basis as the work is seasonal. Those workers may move to other parts of the country during the downtime which means that there is likely to be more transience than if all the employees were permanent staff.

The Te Aroha students did comment on the recent ANZAC Day commemoration which they thought demonstrated that the community “does like to share things together” (Jessica, Te Aroha). “I feel like ANZAC Day we had a big turnout of our town” “Yeah, which shows that our community...” (Ashleigh, Te Aroha) “is strong” Laura interjected. Caitlyn agreed that the town “does like to share things together”. They commented on the large number of people attending including many that represented the school in the parade and it was evident that they enjoyed having this opportunity to participate as a community.

Richard (Te Aroha) observed that children really help bring a community together “and probably if you have got kids, you know, coz obviously they have mates and that, you know of, get involved with them and you have a bunch kind of thing. And so the kids really pull the... like that can really help get groups”. Laura feels that younger children are well catered for in Te Aroha “I think there

are definitely [community] groups for younger people things as well – things like youth groups and things like that. There are no cinemas or malls or things like that”.

It is interesting that the students’ comments about their town’s community feel were so distinctly different. Otorohanga’s focus groups emphasised their strength of community and Te Aroha’s students explained that there were subgroups within the town.

All of the students did say that there are some downsides to living in a small community and this is supported by Bess et al. (2002). Negatives include that there can be a sameness of thought which can be damaging to people who are not included in the community (Bess et al., 2002) or that a community can be close but they do engage in negative behaviours (such as gangs). However, the students did not allude to these types of problems but they all agreed that an issue associated with living in a small town is news of any real or perceived misdemeanour spreads rapidly.

Another drawback is there being limited things to do, which will be discussed in the various sections of this chapter. The Te Aroha students did not think that there was a particularly strong sense of community in their town whereas the Otorohanga students commented on the strength of theirs. Comments by some of the residents in each town reinforce both these opinions.

### **Community events that can encourage sense of community**

The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (2014) explain that connection between members of a society can be of benefit to both the individual as well as the community in which they live. Both Te Aroha and Otorohanga have organised community events interspersed throughout the year and whilst Amit

(2002) explains that sense of community does not rely on everyone participating in everything, what is required is that connection between people is made and that they all have a sense of belonging.

The students in Te Aroha explained that the Cruise In is their biggest event when many classic vehicles converge on the town. The event coincides with one of the schools organising a drive-in cinema and all the Te Aroha students agreed that this is a fun event, particularly now that they all drive. “That’s quite a cool night, you can back your car up and sit in the boot with blankets and stuff. And it’s generally an older movie to do with the cars” (Jade, Te Aroha). Although the film that is shown is not one from the current film circuit, it appears that the film’s content is of much less importance than the fun of the event for the community.

Otorohanga’s students were less sure about which was the main community event of the year. The male students enjoyed the Christmas parade “pretty much everyone goes” (Wiremu, Otorohanga) whereas the female students felt that this is an event only for children but they did concede that they used to enjoy it and that it is a good opportunity to catch up with people that they may not have seen for some time. Both the male and female students agreed that the fun run is one of the main events that can help to bring everyone together “it is a really awesome event to like get the school and community together” (Selina, Otorohanga). Some of the female students in Otorohanga still felt though that people tended to remain in their own circles although they agreed that there was some crossover between the different groups. This is an event where the local businesses give generously, however the students have noticed that these community events take place less often now.

Like five years ago there was stuff happening all the time but I think that just happens when you start to get older, the options start to go away. When you are so young, you are in to everything and do everything so busy all the time (Jason, Otorohanga).

I kind of think that because we are a small town and a lot of small towns around us, like the Waitomo Sports day that's every year, a lot of people from Otorohanga will go there. Only a 10 or 15 minute drive so like we used to have a County Fair a few years ago but they stopped doing that for organisational reasons but like now everyone will go to that, go to the Waitomo Sports Day which is only a quarter of an hour down the road and it's just a fun day for everyone (Mikaere, Otorohanga).

The students thought that as they are getting older there may just be less that appeals to them, but they are sorry that the County Fair in Otorohanga is no longer on the annual calendar.

The female students in Te Aroha explained that one of the distinct disadvantages of living in a comparatively small town is the limited number of things to do since the community events in Te Aroha are generally aimed at either children or seniors. Other events are the Agricultural and Pastoral (A&P) show where one of the students shows animals and there are events and demonstrations. "Yeah, even if it's just watching something – we have like a motorbike person that does doughnuts, I don't know, stuff to watch" (Keri, Te Aroha). Jessica from Te Aroha commented on the Domain Day:

Once a year they have what's called Domain Day so they have a whole lot of stalls. It's quite a family orientated [day] but I feel that when I was younger, I was really keen to go but as I have got older, it is really sort of... it is kind of the same every year so the novelty has worn off as you get older" (Jessica, Te Aroha).

The primary schools also put on events with stalls which are opportunities for community connection. The Te Aroha horse races did not appear to attract either the male or female students except when they are working there fundraising for their sports teams. This will be discussed further in the sport section.

Both towns have a number of events where everyone can participate or come together and all the students recognised that these events are good for the community feel. The female students, in particular, explained that some of the activities do not appeal now. However, this may also be part of their development toward independence as they do not wish to take part in what may be, primarily, child-appealing events.

### **Multi-cultural society**

The two towns did not appear to be as equally open to multi-culturalism. Māori students in Otorohanga expressed that their culture is acknowledged and said that "Another good thing about this town is that they really get into the Māori culture where so many other places don't" (Anahera, Otorohanga)

The students commented that they have experienced other towns that do not include Māori culture and "they just shrug it off" (Selina, Otorohanga). As stated in Table 2, the percentage of the residents who identify as Māori has increased between the 2006 and 2013 censuses from 34 to 38%. Figure 4 shows

that there is a moderately high percentage of Māori adult residents and that the number increases through their forties.

Selina also mentioned that she and her kapa haka group attend festivals and that a member of the community will accompany the group. The supermarket manager who was asked about his overall impressions of the town said that “it is family-oriented, culturally aware...”

Otorohanga students said that although their town is small, it is multi-cultural and welcomes people from other countries including exchange students. They explained that cultural differences are welcomed and that everyone goes out of their way to include the newcomer even though they will only be there temporarily. It was evident from the focus group participants that there is partnership between Māori and Pākehā in Otorohanga and that Māoridom was integral to the town’s inclusiveness. The manager from the supermarket made a comment “that the marae were places of the community coming together and that there were kapa haka groups”.

None of the student participants in Te Aroha specifically raised aspects of Māori culture. It should be noted though that no demographic questions apart from checking that they were 17 years or older, were asked of any of the students and so the students’ ethnicity is not known. Māori participate in some of the town’s events and may be part of the overall community but as one community member explained, Māori tend to have a separate community within the town. She explained that this is not necessarily through choice but Māoridom may not be recognised specifically as a discrete and equal partner with its own culture, throughout the town. Another Māori community member who is working within a social agency was asked about Māori participation in kaupapa Māori. He

suggested that there may be limited opportunities. He cited specifically that the marae was not functioning (it has since been reactivated) and he thought that this would have had a severe impact on Māori embedding their place as partners within the community.

However, Te Aroha has a kaupapa Māori health service and the college celebrates Māori culture in an increasing number of ways. A Māori community member who lives in Te Aroha explained that it will be important that Māori culture is used appropriately and this will help to engage the children (Māori and non-Māori) in community life and suggested that te reo Māori may be offered to all students. Her concern was that aspects of Māori culture may be misappropriated and changed to fit in with non-Māori culture. For example, it will be valuable to use the time of Matariki to inform students about planting and astronomy rather than for an unrelated event just called Matariki. Whilst she appreciated the intention, and recognised that it is important to make things relevant to modern life and young people, with imagination these can be achieved without compromising the culture.

This interviewee explained that school sport is well integrated and that it will be important to capitalise on this. One of the areas which could help would be if there could be waka ama as the Waihou River will be a good location for the rowing. She also commented on how supportive the Matamata-Piako Council have been to Māori cultural activities and, in particular, the recent kapa haka festival. This participant explained that the level of interest from the townspeople had been disappointing though.

One of the interviewees explained that until recently the Tunitumi marae has been dormant but it has been reactivated which may help to forge stronger

community interest in cultural events. Another consideration she raised is that there are comparatively few Māori residents in Te Aroha although, as noted in Table 1, the Māori population number and percentage of the population has increased from 2006 to 2013. The researcher also makes the observation that there are less Māori in the town as they get older. For example, the last census revealed less than 50 residents in each of the five year age categories from 25 onwards which leaves a very small pool of people who may be in a situation to instigate societal change, should they wish to. One last comment made by a community member was that the older, non-Māori members of Te Aroha seem to be receptive to Māori culture but it is anticipated that the young people will begin to be more interested because of the school's community-engaging initiatives.

Both Te Aroha and Otorohanga have residents from other countries. The students in Otorohanga explained that they enjoy having exchange students and several of the participants in Te Aroha and Otorohanga commented that some of the shop owners are from Asia and the Middle East. Heterogeneity of a community is beneficial to that community and so it is helpful to acknowledge and celebrate the differences. Hughey and Speer (2002) explain that it is more beneficial for a community to have differences (and thus be less homogenous) *and* overcome these as it makes for a higher functioning group than if there is complete conformity.

Comments made by the Otorohanga students and community members suggest that there is an acceptance and inclusion of other cultures in their town. Te Aroha's students and community members did not explicitly state that there is celebration of other cultures although, as recorded above, the recent Hauraki Cultural Festival was well supported by the Matamata-Piako Council. The town

also invites the public to “appreciate lively, multicultural arts and cultural scene in Te Aroha” (Tourism New Zealand, n.d.). As a community member explained, this will be to everyone’s advantage so long as it is achieved in a culturally sensitive way.

### **The town library**

Putnam et al. (2004) found that, at least in Chicago, a community’s library is the community’s hub. Instead of libraries becoming obsolete as younger people rely increasingly on their computers and phones, these somewhat ‘old fashioned’ institutions were becoming more popular. Putnam et al. (2004) established that the reason for this was that investment was being made in libraries and their staff, and this aligns particularly with Te Aroha library which has recently been upgraded. The students generally thought that it was a very useful facility with very helpful librarians. Some students had tended to use the library more when they were younger but some participants were really enthusiastic about it and said that it is well suited to their studies with a good range of books.

However it is also a resource that is used by a range of townspeople and provides a place for connection. “It attracts different people. There are always lots of different people” (David, Te Aroha). Finn said “Every time I go, there are always heaps of people on computers”. Te Aroha town library has free Wi-Fi and attracts a wide range of people to use the in-house computers. The car park is also a popular place as the Wi-Fi signal is strong enough to reach computers in vehicles. “There are quite a few people when you go past, sitting outside for the free Wi-Fi” (Finn, Te Aroha).

Otorohanga library also has free Wi-Fi but the students did think that they were stereotyped by some of the library staff who just assumed they only came in

to use the internet connection “but some are not friendly – and just look at you and are you going to get out now?” (Anahera, Otorohanga). Also Brianna said “Yeah, and think oh here they come again”. Brianna further explained later that “She was only nice to me once when I asked her what is a good book to read”.

Otorohanga library has had a recent electronic upgrade which will allow members of the library to access national catalogues and also have ebooks available for external (to the library) use (Otorohanga District Council, 2015). In this library news update the mayor, Max Baxter, makes reference to reducing use of the library services. It is not known if the library has become more popular since the upgrade, but in order to encourage its use as a hub, a library needs to adapt and connect with the community’s population (Putnam et al., 2004). It appears that Te Aroha is achieving this.

### **The school and sense of community**

The school setting provides a social environment that can assist health and wellbeing (Saab & Klinger, 2010). One of the main factors that can influence this is that the students feel a sense of school community and belonging. These feelings can be developed with students engaged in after school clubs that encourage more teamwork (Bateman, 2002). This is because the students gain by the interaction across the entire school but without the pressure of having to achieve.

The Te Aroha students were all of the opinion that there is strong sense of community within the college. One student explained that in her role of responsibility, she has enjoyed everyone in the school knowing her name and greeting her. This is an insightful comment about something as simple as a

friendly greeting and as Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) explain, as humans, we benefit greatly by the display of caring and kind interaction.

The Year 9 and Year 10 period is a very important time in a young person's life (Bibbee, 2013). The Competent Learners longitudinal study (Wylie & Hodgen, 2008) has shown that behaviour that will lead to school disengagement can be influenced at this stage, and so using the transition period to really embed the pupils at secondary school will be beneficial. This also aligns with Erikson's theory of development and that competence (versus a feeling of inferiority) can be achieved during this early adolescent period (Gross, 1987). Te Aroha College is evidently actively seeking out ways to strengthen a sense of school community and has recently introduced a system of peer support. The seniors and new entrants get together for two days before the start of the school year.

We have a programme that the team do for the year 9s – it's called peer support group and they just kind of teach the year 9s for a few days before the rest of the school comes. And just like form a bond with them so that they feel comfortable. (Laura, Te Aroha).

Yes, also with each other, you get into groups and make them do activities so that makes them have like friends. So say your interests and, like, everyone would say and then when you relate to someone, that like forms cliques (Jade, Te Aroha).

The focus group participants thought this process is very helpful "so they [the new entrants] feel comfortable in class" (Laura, Te Aroha) and that the

connections forged during the peer support sessions are maintained. As one student said, she still gets asked for her opinions by the younger students who she mentored. It is suggested that the senior students will benefit from this process too as they may develop a stronger sense of responsibility because of the interaction with the young student and gain by positive reinforcement such as their opinions being sought.

The Otorohanga students all came from different intermediate schools but some knew each through sport, cultural or other community-based events. They may have been on opposing teams but it made the transition to their new school all the easier. “Our community just gels together like” (Anahera, Otorohanga). Younger children have the opportunity to mix “Yeah, there are heaps of COPS which are Combined Otorohanga Primary Schools – we have schools that come together and the kids can mingle round that” (Harry, Otorohanga). This type of arrangement between schools suggests that there is deliberate intention to encourage interaction which may enhance sense of community in Otorohanga. It is likely to have assisted wellbeing when the students transitioned into the college since many of the new entrants will have known each other already.

The students were asked what would happen if they did experience a student who was reluctant to join in. The students have experienced this situation before and they all tried to be friendly and inclusive. However, they also recognise that that person has their own feelings and “swarming on this child, then nah” (Selina, Otorohanga). Mere (Otorohanga) explained that “they probably feel a bit left out but they know that there is help”. They also said that if a newcomer arrived, as one of the male participants had, he would be able to “fit right in”. Of course, it may have been his personality or some other trait that allowed him to

become part of the community immediately but one of the community members also commented on the level of welcome that is given to newcomers:

...we noticed that when we came to Otorohanga, right away we came here and it doesn't matter where you came from, what your background is, you were accepted as who you were. It's the person, yeah and it's still like that. (Anne Laws, Community Board member)"

Whilst the Community Board Member's experience may be quite different to a teenager's, and she explained that her family arrived in the town many years ago, both provide similar opinions of the welcome offered to newcomers.

Te Aroha students commented on the feeling of community that exists in their school:

I don't know about community spirit but like you have friends, everyone in your year group, you've got like your best friends and, I don't know how to put it, if you leave, you will only have your best friends and like not a whole school and all those adults and like you were asking who would you go to, then it goes down like only a few people. (Jade, Te Aroha).

The comments from Otorohanga indicate that the college has a sense of community and the students have a sense of belonging to that community. Te Aroha students also felt that they have a sense of community within the college. There are defined plans to consolidate this, such as through the peer support programme which has recently been introduced, and give every pupil the chance to feel that they belong to the school community. A Māori community member

explained that the college was the obvious place to encourage and reinforce integration between Māori and non-Māori.

## **Part 2. The students' opinions of direct contributors to wellbeing**

This section of the findings chapter discusses the factors that will mainly have a direct effect on an adolescent's sense of wellbeing. It is generally assumed that most people want to feel that they belong in their community and it is important to a person's self-esteem to be treated as though they are valued. These topics were discussed with the focus group participants and community members because it was important to learn the students' opinions, as well as how the community members believed the students were treated and regarded.

### **Sense of belonging/sense of value**

Population Health (2014) explains that it is important to celebrate the contribution that youth make to their society and so all the students were asked how they felt they were treated within their town. Whitham (2012) suggests that it is vital to get youth input for local policy development and it helps build the young person's network of contacts. Otorohanga students were able to provide a concrete example that the town is very interested in its youth and has a junior council which is part of the Town Council. This group of students really feel that their voice is heard and their opinions sought.

Definitely – for example our Council has, for the past few years, opened a junior council which is like students from our college and around come together for like a council meeting and they are really focused on getting young people involved in the community and stuff (Jason, Otorohanga).

In Te Aroha the students also believed that, on the whole, the town respects its youth population. They explained that there are lots of youth events and that there is a Youth Empowerment Service (YES). As a community member explained, YES advocate for youth. They survey the young population in the town to get information on which to act, organise community events and have a youth leadership development programme. Although there is no direct youth representation, the Matamata-Piako District Councillors are the point of contact for any youth. This Council also receives government funding for some youth led events for the area's young people.

Both Otorohanga and Te Aroha have community based sessions for their youth. Otorohanga has a weekly group for younger adolescents. Grace explained that it is a "Cool event. It's called Youth and it's for kids around Otorohanga and you can go there, what day is it, I think it is on a Thursday or a Friday. There's a rock climbing wall and for heaps of sort of younger kids to get together". In Te Aroha, the Youth Empowerment Service hosts community events regularly such as their recent slime party and quiz nights. A BMX track is currently being built and it is hoped that many from the community and in particular youth, will enjoy the facility.

The information provided suggests that youth are given opportunities to participate in community led events. Although no inferences can be made, it does demonstrate that both towns invest in their youth's activities and encourage socialisation which will enhance wellbeing.

### **Friendliness and respect shown to the youth**

There is no doubt that youth are a country's most valuable resource (Kelly, 2003). It is interesting therefore, to consider if this is demonstrated towards all youth when they interact on a daily basis within their town.

### **Friendliness**

The students were asked if they were treated in a friendly manner generally. Te Aroha male students were a bit guarded in their responses and explained that it depends upon which shop but generally everyone was friendly towards them. "If it's the bakery, they're pretty good" (Finn, Te Aroha). The female students in Te Aroha found that usually they were treated with friendliness and respect. They did explain that how someone was treated would depend upon their reputation but that that person had earned the reaction so it really was their own fault.

Yeah, I think they do but it all depends on who you are.

Yeah definitely. If they know you are not a good person, like a little hoodlum, they are not really going to be very respectful to you or might be very conscious that you are in their shop or – but that is purely your fault – that is the name you have been given so that is what you are branded I guess. (Keri, Te Aroha).

The male Otorohanga students explained that they are usually treated in a very friendly manner in shops. This is partially because they know most of the people who work in them as some may have attended college or are relations and other students work in the shops part time, "Most of the shops are owned by people we know" (Max, Otorohanga). Zack expanded upon this "Especially the dairies. They will have a conversation if they have the time to do it but they have

to run their own shop”. He then explained “some dairies have students working there. So we say hi. Either go to school with or related to [other students]”. The female Otorohanga students explained that students who live in the hostels, so come from out of town, can be treated differently to the townspeople and tend to be grouped together and, say, if one is accused of a misdemeanour, they are all tarred with the same brush (unfairly). They did agree that the dairy owners are the most friendly. The girls also suggested that, to a certain extent, your family determines how you will be treated in Otorohanga. For example, if the student’s parent is a strong sportsperson, they will be welcomed but if there is some rumour about your family, the students felt a person may even be ignored.

### **Respect**

All of the students felt that the colleges’ staff treat them with a lot of respect and really value youth – and that the staff will go way beyond what is expected of them to help the students. In fact, they suggested that this is one of the advantages of living in a smallish town since, as Ashleigh (Te Aroha) explained, “Also because our small town, more one on one time with teachers” and this can help create a stronger bond than she thought may occur in a larger school. The Te Aroha students did not seem to think that they were shown a lot of respect in the shops though. The Otorohanga students believe that they are treated with respect in most of the town, although the females felt that the family you came from might determine how much respect was shown. This aspect will be discussed further in the sport section.

### **School leavers in the community**

The Te Aroha students all know people of around their age (17 and over) who are not in their school. Some had moved to a bigger school or to start work

but there are some young people who are not in training or working. The students thought that they probably all socialise together and may gain some link with the community collectively. This response indicated that the students may not actually know if these ex-pupils were connected to the community as a group and the situation of some young people who are not in school, training or employment was raised by a community agency worker who has worked with young people. Her experience of these young people was that she has found that they are experiencing hardship and that they struggle to access support. There is a divergence of views on this which can be theoretically explained by social construction and that social issues will be regarded differently by different people. It is possible also that one person has direct knowledge of circumstances but in the context of this thesis, it reinforces the comment that was made by the students that there are several different groups within the town. This in itself indicates that there is not a cohesive society which could be the basis of sense of community. This is an area that justifies further research.

The Otorohanga students did not know anyone in their Year 13 cohort that had left early. One had left but returned and they all felt that in addition to losing out on the education, it would be a lot harder without friends around. One made the comment that if someone left early, they were being lazy. This comment is interesting in itself as it indicates that not remaining in school in Otorohanga, is possibly outside the normal expectation. It does mean though that someone who may, for whatever reason (such as not being academically inclined), be unable or unwilling to stay at school until the end of Year 13 might be branded with a social construction that turns out to be inaccurate.

### **Support and seeking help**

The students were asked that if they had a problem, would they know someone they could go and talk to for help to resolve the issue.

Te Aroha students said that, without exception, they would have someone to whom they could talk to help sort out a problem if it arose. They explained that one of the benefits of being part of a small school is that students develop a rapport with staff. If the problem was one where it was most appropriate to talk to a staff member, they would have no problem approaching one of the college staff. This was also a point discussed with a community member who thought that support was more readily available nowadays. He suggested that there is a different attitude towards anyone experiencing difficulties now than when he was growing up when “it was sort of get over it, get on with it”.

Otorohanga’s participants felt that they had a selection of people they could go to – and that it depended upon the issue. They were confident that that person would be able to help them out, particularly since they are part of the college community. Liam explained “Especially for being a student at the college. Most of the teachers around here. Like if there’s something wrong, there’s one of them out of all that will be the best person to talk to them about it” Jason agreed that “if you say to a teacher you have got a problem, then they will help you out. They will talk to you about it”. Once they have left school, they still feel that there will be plenty of support available within the town as Jason explained that “There’s tons of support in Otorohanga” such as one of the students being offered a temporary job while they decide on future training. This is another interesting point as earlier a Te Aroha student had suggested that if a young person left school, they might only have their close friends in the same

situation with whom to socialise. It may be that the Otorohanga students are more aware of the links within their community, or they may just have the belief that the community cares about them, or that the community has demonstrated that it cares about others and thus will always look out for its own residents. Although the underlying mechanism for this is not known, the feeling of being cared for and supported does appear to contribute to wellbeing.

### **Safety within the town**

The Te Aroha students had varying opinions on the feeling of safety in the town. The female students all agreed that there is a big difference between day and night safety, and most students would be wary at night and conscious of everyone in their surrounds. “You are relatively safe” (Ashleigh, Te Aroha) but the topography of Te Aroha may influence this. There is a footbridge that crosses the river to the north of the road bridge and goes over wetlands. They explained that there have been some alcohol-fuelled “pranks” (a student’s word) but two were serious. This river seems to create a divide and which side of the river the students lived on was the one that they knew best and felt most at ease. They also mentioned that there is a small area of the town where unlawful people tend to live. The students said that they would not mix with these people but as they explained “We know where it’s safe” “It’s a small town so we know where to go” to avoid this element and that there are “just different people who live differently”. This comment suggests that the students have a store of cultural capital – as they have a knowledge about a dimension of their environment and use this knowledge to their advantage. A community member agreed that there is an unlawful part of the town and that people living in it may be exposed to situations that are unlikely to help a sense of wellbeing. What was not identified

is whether those young people have a sense of their own community or subgroup within Te Aroha.

Otorohanga perhaps has less of a geographical divide in that the Waipa River skirts the town. The male students said that the sense of community makes them feel safe. “Someone’s always there looking out for you, they have got your back”. The female students agreed that although they have heard of bad situations such as through the Otorohanga blog that posts warnings, Brianna said “You do see some scary stories like on Otorohanga blog – like be careful seen somebody walking down blah de blah but generally if you wanted to walk down to town at 9 at night, although I don’t know why you would do that, but like you would be okay”. There is a feeling that because you know everyone and everyone knows you and your family, you will be amongst friends “Yeah, you know everyone and everyone knows my family” (Michaela, Otorohanga). “Yeah, so it is almost like they will be a family friend you know” (Grace, Otorohanga). One participant suggested that they might not feel this same assurance in a neighbouring town although they conceded that it would probably be all right. Brianna and Michaela had a conversation “It is just that you are used to seeing people you know and your environment that you have been in and you go somewhere and it is totally different and sometimes you get ...” “It is just like weird hey?” “Yeah,” “You get a shock, it is just so different”. The point was that the student does not know those people, whereas she knows her town’s people. One student said that even though she would not know everyone, she would feel safe. The feelings of safety are likely to have a direct effect on wellbeing although the Te Aroha students’ comments suggested that they may have developed cultural capital. This is where

they understand and negotiate an underlying structure for their own benefit. In this case, it would be how to make sure they remain safe.

## **Sport**

Participation in sport is linked to social connection (Hoye et al., 2015) and increased psychological wellbeing (Ussher et al., 2007). Sport in general was discussed frequently during the focus groups and all the community members raised various sporting activities as integral to their communities.

Most of the focus group participants were still playing sport and because of their sport, were involved in other areas of the community which will help to strengthen the bonds between members of the community. The first of these is that the Te Aroha students work at events such as the A&P show doing tasks like supervising the bouncy castle. One Te Aroha student stated that “the schools offer the sports teams for fundraisers. We work and [the event organiser] just pay the school and that gets divided by how ever many people went [to work]”. This money can then be used for, say, the netball team going to a competition. The other way that sport also provides a means of connection raised by the Te Aroha female students is that several of the participants coach younger sports teams.

Te Aroha has a number of sporting events that take place at community level and are open to everyone. A member of the community explained that football is getting more popular and there are increasing numbers of young children’s teams. He explained that the Council is in the midst of improving the facilities for the footballers. There is also a go-kart club which attracts racers from as far as Auckland. The male students explained that sport is a really good chance for the community to join together. Sports such as golf, squash, football,

rugby, cricket and the gym were mentioned, and several of the community members and students commented on the quality of Te Aroha sports facilities and the benefit that they provide to the community.

Most of the Te Aroha students who took part in the research are very involved in sport and only one no longer plays due to other commitments. Netball is the sport which most female students participated in but they also enjoyed athletics and volleyball and have played hockey and soccer in the past.

The Te Aroha students find that the townspeople and other students support inter-college sports matches although this may depend upon the distance to the sports meet.

Our sports teams are close because we are such a small school and we know each other but there are other teams always going to be a lot more – you, like the boys are going to come and cheer the[ir] girls teams on. (Ashleigh, Te Aroha).

Sport is also very important in Otorohanga and it is evident that it provides a lot of opportunity for social cohesion, although it may also be slightly divisive. The Otorohanga male students explained that their school is in the top 10% of schools for student participation in sport. This is a national measure. The main male students' sport is rugby but there is also swimming and soccer and netball was the sport that most female participants played. Both the male and female students explained that one of the town's disadvantages was in relation to sport – that the talent spotters may not come down to their regional town and so it would be more difficult to get to the next level than if they lived in a bigger centre. The issue that may be potentially disuniting is, ironically, related to the enthusiasm

and importance placed on sport by some of the students. They suggested that a person, or their family, who has had great success as a sportsperson might be given preferential treatment within the town on the basis of this status.

The students also explained that they have benefitted greatly from the top sportsmen and women who have come from the town and that they act as strong motivators as well as reinforcing that they are proud of their town and the cohesion that has been created.

You look out in the hallway and see we have people like Rory Grice and people like that gone through the ranks from our college, through our sports club and then now they are both over in France playing for Grenoble as professional players and Rory came back for about a month and he came in and coached the first 15 and so we have guys in the big world doing stuff like that but still come back and help us out and stuff like that. (Liam, Otorohanga).

Brooks and Magnusson (2006) studied adolescents' level of participation in schools in Britain. The authors make the point that the students themselves will, to a certain extent, measure their value according to how they are "socially valued" (p.873). In other words, if they are lithe and fit, they will be more valued than someone who is inactive and perhaps overweight. This may not appear to have a major relevance in this study and, yet, there is connection between emotional wellness, physical wellness and social connection and that appears to influence the transition period from school to adulthood. Thus identifying what barriers prevent an adolescent taking part in physical activity will be pertinent.

Brooks and Magnusson (2006) suggest that initiatives such as involving the students in the design of the school sports clothing and what activities will be on offer will help to encourage participation in sport. The research also found that encouraging and praising the students in these activities was shown to have a positive effect. Brooks and Magnusson have found that the benefit is gained because of the taking part rather than the success of the team. They suggest that pupils who attend practise with commitment but are not the best players, should be included in the teams because it is demonstrating that participation is the important value.

Both towns evidently value sporting involvement and it is evident that Te Aroha are justifiably proud of their facilities. It does appear to provide a lot of opportunity for connection amongst the community members. Although the inference is that this helps students' wellbeing, the mechanism for that benefit is not established. The links that provide the benefit may, in fact, be the formation of social capital.

### **Sport as the adolescents begin to leave school**

As we have seen, participation in sport can contribute to adolescent wellbeing through a number of ways including providing an opportunity to gain social interaction skills and improve cognitive function, and lessening anxiety and depression. With the exception of one student who has other commitments, the students are involved in community-based sport and the benefits from more than just the physical exercise are evident.

Participation in sport is a useful means of providing bridging social capital (Hoye et al., 2015). Their quantitative study considered civic and/or sporting

involvement and it established that there was social connection when a person played sport. Team sports were particularly beneficial. An example of interconnection is that the rugby club encourages the students from the college to train with them if the students are not involved in one of their own games.

I go down to the rugby club and train with them and if our First XV does not have a game, they are more than happy to have us down there. And there are probably a few boys that have grown up around the place so like when we leave school, we have somewhere to play rugby (Harry, Otorohanga).

Well we have people everywhere like just talk to us about what we are doing when we leave school. Guys around the town, [xx] who owns a [xx] company, which is one of the biggest companies here and he talked to me about when I want to leave school, if I want to get a job there like temporarily while I figure out what I want to do. That's pretty cool, yeah (Wiremu, Otorohanga).

As Wiremu's comment states, the students are aware that these types of places allow for interaction between the adults and the students and the students learn that the businesses will provide work. It was noted that the students do not take this type of support for granted "that's probably the thing that makes Oto so special – everything is about everyone from Oto" (Jason, Otorohanga). Wiremu, a student from Otorohanga College, made the comment though that "Once you get a bit older say us in a couple of years or maybe a bit later than that you start dropping off sports as work or university...".

Te Aroha also has a strong connection amongst the community as a result of sport. A community member explained that the town has the benefit of Boyd Park, a big park with rugby grounds. There are two main rugby clubs – Waihou and College Old Boys and there are also two main netball clubs – Waihou and College Old Girls. “We know a lot of adults because I play men’s grade [rugby].” (Richard, Te Aroha). The twilight sports which take place in the summer evenings are particularly valuable in this respect. The games begin at about 6pm and finish around 9pm. These are open to everyone, are advertised around the town and word of the events “spread around people” as “anyone can do it” (Richard, Te Aroha). “So every summer they have like club rugby with the COBRAS in it - it’s a fundraiser thing so they have tournaments, and there are prizes and you enter a team of mates” (Dan, Te Aroha). (COBRAS – College Old Boys Rugby and Sports).

Whilst these opportunities may demonstrate cohesion amongst the participating sportspeople, the current research findings suggest that they are actually accumulating social capital.

There are some negatives that will have a basis in sport though. Whilst sport can be a great leveller, not all sport is inclusive. Hoye et al. (2015) explain that it can be a point of bringing people together and extending social networks, but that ethnic minorities can be excluded. A community member in Te Aroha explained that a young person is not being selected to play games because that person has not been able to attend the practices. Transport has been the problem “The team should be supporting [this person], I would be surprised if [this person] plays again next year”. Baxendine et al. (2005) confirms this process of exclusion

by stating that “When appropriate transport is not available individuals and communities may be excluded from: • Access to work: • Access to social, cultural, and sporting activities” (p.54). Since this thesis is based on the question of whether sense of community can enhance an adolescent’s wellbeing, it raises the point that there may not be sense of community or, indeed, sense of community is not the criterion required to ensure that this young person is included in her team’s games. It is possible that this young person and her family lack the social capital which could be converted into a useable resource to ensure that she does manage to attend the practices.

Liam, a student in Otorohanga, suggested that sport is probably the main connector and “That [getting to know someone] would be through sport but if you got other boys that did not play sport that come together for something else, like music or cars or something like that”. This means that potentially, if the student did not play sport they could be quite isolated. However, a member of the school community explained that there are various non-sport based clubs and communities which provided opportunity for students with interests other than sport to be included in activities. One activity that was mentioned is dancing but the college has a range of arts as part of the curriculum (Otorohanga College, n.d.)

David from Te Aroha suggested that “If you’re not sports orientated, it can be a bit tough” and Dan agreed “For something that’s entertaining because you can’t just like go to the movies, or bowling, that kind of stuff”. The town does not have regular venues, such as cinemas, for ongoing entertainment that might be available in a larger centre. Te Aroha College does offer a range of the arts such as media studies, drama and music as part of their curriculum (Te Aroha College,

n.d.) but willingness to participate in any school-based activity may rely on the student being engaged in the school community. It does mean that if the young person has left school, or is disengaged, they will lose the opportunity of these extra-curricular activities and this potential social connection.

### **Casual work opportunities**

Casual work offers another opportunity for seeing other members of the community and provides further linkage and whilst it may increase economic capital, the employment was possibly gained as a result of their social capital (Bassani, 2007) and the strength of their social networks (Rablen,2012).

All the participants also felt that casual work opportunities were greater in their comparatively small town than a bigger centre and only one was not working but that was because he had not sought it. David stated about casual employment in Te Aroha “even though Te Aroha is small, there are still chances, plenty of chances”. The female students were perceptive to recognise the social value of the interaction gained by employment. As Jade from Te Aroha said

Yeah, well, you know, there’s nothing like that [shopping malls] so that’s a negative but I think that it is good that there is a lot of opportunities in Te Aroha like lots of different things even though it is a farming town.

Most of the Otorohanga students said that there is plenty of casual work although one commented “Just depends if you are picky or not”. They explained that jobs are available at Countdown or MacDonalDs. The manager of the local supermarket explained their casual employee policy and whilst full background checks are conducted, vacancies and opportunities are networked through word of

mouth. He explained that they “try to” employ everyone who applies (so long as they pass the checks). These students were asked if they recognise that it is probably unusual for there to be sufficient casual work readily available and they agreed that it was probably not the case in the bigger centres where there was more demand than availability. Mere also thought that social connections would help.

Yeah, and it is more about how you are so like if your family is a well-known family, you will probably get a job over someone who is not so well known. Like from out of town because it is like a real family place and you get jobs if your family works somewhere (Mere, Otorohanga).

Grace agreed that who you know would probably help in securing casual work as “It is not so much based on qualifications as in the city”.

Selina explained “Even at MacDonaldis, some of my mates got a job there because their auntie worked there – that’s cool but that is how it works”. As will be discussed in Section 3, some employment is not readily available to young people because the pay rates are only slightly less than the adult rates and health and safety requirements are so demanding. However, in places like MacDonaldis or a supermarket these factors seem to be less of an issue than, say, in an engineering workshop. The comment that the aunt managed to get her niece the job suggests more than sense of community. This family connection has been converted in a useable contact which aligns with social capital.

### **Threats to wellbeing of youth**

Returning to the comment made by the supermarket manager about passing the recruitment checks, this raises the question of what happens when a young person does not meet the criteria of the checks of any potential employer. One of the Te Aroha interviewees discussed this at some length because there are young people who cannot get on the employment ladder because they have failed to be free of drugs. This is the type of scenario that neatly fits in social construction. The tests will be conducted to safeguard the prospective employee as well as the benefit of the employer. Working with machinery under the influence of various substances can be dangerous but this does mean that the benefit of social capital is negated. The construction here is that the substance reading will have a detrimental effect on the performance of the employee. It can be argued though that employment will reduce boredom, give the young person a sense of purpose, increase their self-esteem and all of these have been found to be protective factors, amongst other things, against the use of illicit drugs (Havitz, Morden, & Samdahl, 2004).

### **Transport**

The Otorohanga students said that there is no bus service within the town because most distances were walkable. There is an infrequent bus service to Hamilton although there may be other buses that go to Te Awamutu. As one of the students explained, the bus is a little like the sports scouts as it gets “almost to Oto and then all the way back [to the city]”. There is also a train service that comes through the town which stops in Hamilton. Interestingly, the Otorohanga students commented on the “isolation” of their town geographically, although the students also said that they do not find transport a problem now that they are

older. They thought it was an issue when they were a few years younger as they had to rely on their parents taking them. They explained that now that they can earn money and are permitted to drive, this has given them an increasing level of independence.

The college provides a free bus service to school and the students felt that the bus was another link between community members since many of the younger school children are on the same bus and say hello to the college students.

Yeah so obviously all the kids are like the school kids because they are on their own bus. They all say hello to you and all the students from the college, we all know each other and so if they jump on the bus then like, hey what did you get up to in the weekends (Michaela, Otorohanga).

The Te Aroha students did not mention transport as being an issue. The participants can drive now. As discussed in Part Three of this chapter, a community member suggests that having no transport is severely limiting, particularly if that person needs to get to work for a shift that is beginning or ending at a time that a restricted licence holder is not permitted to drive.

Many of the opinions given were enthusiastic and all the students enjoyed living in their regional town, although several explained that they are now keen to experience a larger town as they move into training or study. Some community members based in Te Aroha gave less positive information and explained that there are members of their community who have not managed the transition from school to paid employment and are increasingly marginalised, and who become, in effect, invisible. “..you know they had nothing to do, they had no hope for the

future; there were no jobs in town”. This opinion of the availability of work differs markedly from the students’ experiences. This particular research project has considered the influence of the community from a positive perspective and sought the opinions of engaged students who were in their final year of school, so the information about the young people who are marginalised has been valuable. Whilst it has not been used specifically in this research project, it does clarify that social cohesion or sense of community may be a helpful property, but a commodity that can help a person to progress is social capital.

### **Conclusion of how the community perceives their youth and its impact on wellbeing.**

The students were asked how they perceive themselves to be valued by their community. The reason why this question is being asked is because it is suggested that how a young person is treated will have a very strong bearing on their sense of wellbeing (Jiménez-Iglesias, Moreno, Ramos, & Rivera, 2015). It may also have an influence on their motivation to succeed, effect their self-esteem and their sense of belonging which all are associated with a sense of wellbeing.

The adolescents who took part in this research project are all in their final year of school and, as is shown, have a clear career pathway in their sights. Since they are at this stage, they have already demonstrated a mastery of their situation and have explained that they know where to seek help and support if it is required. It is suggested that they also have good self-esteem since the participants were recruited by self-selection and are unlikely to put themselves forward if they did not feel confident. They also mainly held positions of responsibility in their schools and participated in team sports. For these reasons they may not be entirely representative of their cohort. As has been discussed in Chapter Two,

having mastery and a feeling of self-efficacy, self-esteem and being sporty all contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing, but this information cannot determine if the way they are treated has had a bearing on that sense of wellbeing.

Some inferences might indicate the effects though. The Te Aroha students found that on the whole they were treated in a reasonable way. Some found that their library staff were helpful. The students expressed their appreciation of the respect that is given to them by the staff at the college. They really were enthusiastic about this which may indicate that they enjoy being respected and thus it may have a bearing on their sense of wellbeing. Other areas where it might be inferred that respect is shown are in the community based sports where they play with and against the adult members of the community and, it is suggested, when they are recruited to help at community events. Tasks like supervising the bouncy castle are jobs with responsibility and it is highly unlikely that someone who is not well regarded would be assigned the care of children.

The Otorohanga students did appear to find that the way they were treated, since they were generally treated very well, does seem to help them and reinforces a community feeling. The more direct influence on wellbeing which can be provided by the students perceiving that everyone is looking out for them, is believed to add to their sense of wellbeing. Another important factor in wellbeing is that, because of the close association between the commercial enterprises and the college and the town's residents, the students feel that they have options. As one student explained, he has already been offered temporary employment before he enters training. As research has determined, this sense of security is an important factor in an adolescent's wellbeing (Small & Memmo, 2004).

### **Part Three**

This section considers local aspects that may influence an adolescent's sense of wellbeing as they begin to move towards adulthood.

#### **Certainty**

“Modernity is intrinsically disorderly because it obliges individuals to experiment, to hope, to gamble, and to be ambitious. Its social life lacks the predictability and the certainties that characterise societies governed by tradition” (Savage, Warde, & Ward, 2003). This section discusses aspects of certainty and consistency and how these can affect the adolescent. The focus groups' participants were self-selected through flyers placed in the two colleges. The participants may not be representative of their society, or the wider New Zealand group of students. They were already demonstrating high achievement within their schools as many were office bearers and most of the students have a clear plan of what they will do once they leave school and how they intend to transition to a career of their choice. This is another important factor in wellbeing as one of the main indicators of Martinez et al.'s 2012 study was a sense of purpose. Martinez et al. (2012) cite Erikson's work on the developmental phases and that one of the tasks of the period of adolescence is to find a meaning for future existence – and overcoming the uncertainties which can plague a teenager. That the students are all motivated to proceed into a career will assist the transition period (De Ridder et al., 2014; Schneider, 2009).

The Te Aroha female students have already selected their career pathways and have plans in place for their tertiary education. Almost all will begin that training in 2016 but one student has postponed training for a year in order to gain more experience in her chosen field. All the tertiary training will take place in

larger centres/cities in New Zealand – with possible onward training abroad. Of the male Te Aroha students, two already have places at university and have explored what post-graduate study they will need for their planned careers. Two others have yet to finalise plans but have their paths mapped out. It is evident that all have invested much effort in identifying what they want to do and is feasible, and how they plan to get there “Yeah, I want to do a post-graduate course as that is my end goal to do that, but you have to do the bachelor first” (Dan, Te Aroha). One student plans to go into a trade.

All the Otorohanga students have also mapped out their career pathway. Some of the female students plan to study for professions and the male students plan to follow a wide range of careers including the armed forces and farming. Two of the participants plan on following a trade.

### **Resilience**

The ability to be able to cope with adversity, resiliency, varies from person to person and will depend, to an extent, on their own characteristics. However there are some factors that will encourage the development of resilience. Some of these can come from external sources such as support from others and even the community in which a person lives.

Hodgetts et al. (2010) explain that a psychological sense of place is a mixture of geography and social processes. The strength of the links within a community and prosocial behaviours associated with that community will all be incorporated in a person’s self-identity. All these benefits can assist in withstanding or overcoming problems, and in having resilience. Hodgetts et al. (2010) further suggest that the community in which a person lives may add an

additional facet – and that is community resilience. Interestingly, the need for resilience did not arise explicitly in the discussions with the participants.

However their belief in their ability to meet the future challenges may have been an example of their ability to cope with new situations. Resilience is often associated with adversity and none of the participants specifically explained that they had had to deal with hardship but, for example, some had relocated, made new friends and live in a different environment. Another student has moved several times. In all these cases the participants demonstrated that instead of being a “victim”, they made the most of the situation and took advantages of the opportunities available in their new town.

#### **A local future - plans to return once the students have finished their tertiary education**

Several of the participants in Otorohanga explained that they hope to return once they have lived in a bigger centre. Several community members said that they would encourage the young people to see the world and then choose if they want to come home. As Liam from Otorohanga said “there will always be a home here for us”. Mikaere explained “You could probably see loads of ex-students from this college working around town. They choose to stay”.

Some of the female students in Otorohanga explained that once they have completed their training they may return. “I think Otorohanga is like a really settled place, you come back” (Anahera, Otorohanga). Those who do not plan to return said they will definitely come back for visits as they have family and friends there and enjoy the town “I don’t know, the other places, Oto seems like a good community, nice people, you get along with everyone just like something for everyone” (Miri, Otorohanga).

I think that is one of the biggest things – like being in a small town, would get trapped into thinking there is not a lot else out there and it's just what we can see around us whereas there are all these places around us, in countries that we have never seen or don't even know it's there, and its good and there are adults around us and family, will say go and enjoy it while you can and, if you like it, stay there but you are welcome to come back (Max, Otorohanga)

This sense of continuity is echoed by the Community Board member who explained that there is some sense of constancy – staff at the school have taught at the school for a long time – one teacher had taught two generations. As she said “and they have known my kids and it's a nice feeling and this permeates right down through the community and you walk down the street and that teacher has taught your kids and so you can talk to them”.

This interest to return may be, in part, because the young people recognise that their local industry values young people. It is evident from the various discussions with community members that Otorohanga businesses value their youth. Whitham's (2012) study of addressing the issue of youth unemployment in Otorohanga identified that the main parties involved in policy-making in Otorohanga have made a point of understanding the town's employers, their needs and the community's needs. This recognition of the dynamics between what is required to meet labour demands and creating the forum for a collaboration on an ongoing basis amongst the stakeholders is extremely valuable, and has been shown to improve the transition for young people from school into work (Schoon

& Silbereisen, 2009). Until the early 2000s, Otorohanga was importing its skilled labour force, 40% of the residents had no formal qualifications and there was an unemployment rate of 5.5% (Whitham, 2012). These same businesses have benefitted by valuing their youth. A community member also explained that the businesses are enthusiastic to employ the Trade Training Centre graduates.

I know that [a] business has grown by [several hundred percent] in the last six or seven years so [they are] just expanding and one of our avid supporters of apprentices. [name of company] often has about six apprentices in the business at any one time.

(Community member, Otorohanga).

Te Aroha male students thought that it was important to experience a bigger centre, a city, but that they would not rule out returning at some future point. They suggested that Te Aroha is a good place to retire and they also agreed that it is a good family place “a good place to raise kids” (Richard, Te Aroha).

Grace from Otorohanga said “I am pretty sure my parents are going to live here for the rest of their lives”. Anahera agreed “I think my parents will live here for the rest of their lives too – or at least around the area”.

The female students do not have a strong intention to return to Te Aroha but this may not be to do with the town itself. In fact they commented that it would be a safe and good environment in which to bring up a family “I think it is really a good town to have a family and stuff” but it is possibly perceived as somewhere for older people “Yeah, to retire”. The participants had a variety of reasons why returning to Te Aroha was probably unlikely – one family is moving

to another town, another would not be able to pursue her chosen profession in the town.

### **A local future - employment**

As has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, as industry strived for increasing efficiencies on the global market, some manufacturing and service industries have moved to other countries where there will be lower wages. Both Te Aroha and Otorohanga lost employers as they relocated their manufacturing to outside New Zealand although as noted earlier, Otorohanga was less affected by Munro Caravans moving than Bendon leaving Te Aroha.

Putnam et al. (2004) uses the example of Tupelo, Mississippi which was a town struggling after an environmental disaster and severely declining industry. The town was dying but collective and innovative investment in one idea - stud bulls - helped to turn the town around. Whilst the original business idea has been hugely successful, it was that a *community* was nurtured that has resulted in the major success of the town. One of the important steps was establishing a development board with focus on the sustainability of a community. Whilst the town's own success has resulted in its own problems with the population having increased four-fold, efforts are made to maintain links between townspeople using collaboration and cooperation. Examples such as creating a community hub in the library, as discussed in Part 1 of Chapter Five have been shown to help (Putnam et al., 2004).

Some Scandinavian countries adopted the Keynesian principles (Mills & Blossfeld, 2009) that are evident in Otorohanga too. The principle is that government policy focusses on maximising employment opportunities which will,

in turn, create jobs (such as child day care) and has resulted in youth seeing a future for themselves. Whitham (2012) explains that Otorohanga has taken a somewhat Keynesian approach whereby full employment is given higher priority than short-term increased profit. As a community member stated without reservation, local companies will take on more staff than they might *require* but that their interest is more in the wellbeing of the town's population. A business owner and community members also explained that some employers in Otorohanga are prepared to take on staff that they do not require.

Otorohanga does have opportunities for transitioning from school into trade training and this provides a local option for school leavers and those students who do not plan to enrol in university. Dalziel (2013) suggests that more trade training opportunities will increase the pathways available to school leavers with a diversity of aptitude.

Although there are uncertainties about ongoing funding (Carson & Gardner, 2012), the Otorohanga students appear to have a feeling of certainty about their future which may reduce barriers, and as Bess et al. (2002) explain, in today's world, certainty is all the more important and comforting. A Community Board member, when referring to the youth's general feeling that there is a place for them, stated:

And I think part of that's the Trade Training Centre because there is some place where they can get a trade and they don't need to leave their community and they feel more secure....It is quite interesting because of the type of community that we have got, the sharing, the young people have a sense of belonging and it,

don't know how to put it, yes they are proud, there is a pride.

(Community Board Member, Otorohanga)

Conversely, when an individual does not have the opportunity to transition from education into work, that person's situation can result in marginalisation as unemployment may be the principle factor in pushing someone out of the mainstream of society (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012). Macro factors affect at the individual and community levels and so global market influences will have a bearing on post-education opportunities (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012).

### **Some future career challenges for youth**

Schoon and Silbereisen (2009) describe the period between school and work as a potentially difficult time. Opportunities available will be dependent upon many factors such as academic achievement and flexibility of the person seeking work and not everyone will have a choice of pathway. If a person does have the privilege to select, he or she may still probably be partially limited by macro level factors such as the labour market of that time (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009). The transfer from school to work that was prevalent in past generations is less assured and there is less workplace stability (Mills & Blossfeld, 2009).

Additionally, as has been discussed earlier, an impression of the 'ideal' youth is used to determine all the other young people who do not meet this standard as somehow failing or lacking in the appropriate skills and personal qualities that enable them to move straight into well-functioning adulthood. There will be many reasons why this progression does not occur and many of them are not as a result of anything that the youth did or did not manage. Some of these are

discussed in relation to the comments made by the various focus group participants and community members

One Te Aroha business person explained that when he was leaving school there were plenty of opportunities within the town to move into trade training:

I think it was a lot easier especially on the job front. We had a lot of infrastructure in Te Aroha. Believe it or not there were five service stations where you could buy petrol. We had the Bendon factory, we had the Inland Revenue and the Power Board as well running, that's just in town so it was actually a very thriving town. In my area, when you left college, there was no problem to go and get a job"

Some of these will have been through social connections, others through after-school work and direct representation since there was plentiful employment.

As a community member explained, and research by Bottrell et al. (2010) reveals, access to good career pathways is not the same for everyone and there is a widening gap between the young people who will follow a career and those who struggle to make the transition from school to work (Walther, 2009). The adolescents who do not move into work immediately can become marginalized, excluded and their apparent failure is attributed to them rather than the environment in which they live (Walther, 2009).

The students were perceptive when they stated that not all youth in Te Aroha have the same level of opportunity. This was borne out by comments made by some of the members of the community. An example of this inequity is if Te Aroha youth experience difficulties with transport. Transport is partially related

to financial capital but it is also about social resources and being able to obtain lifts from people who do have a car and are permitted to take passengers. Jones (2009) explains that if parents are unable to provide their children with financial and social capital (for example, transporting the adolescents to their place of work), this further exacerbates the division between young people who are helped with the transition and those who face many barriers.

One of the members of the community who was interviewed explained that another barrier for young people to move in to work is the licencing system. He explained that there are many jobs that would involve sending a young person on an errand to another town to pick up an item. So long as that young person holds a learner's licence which is for a minimum of six months and minimum age of 16.5 years, they are not permitted to travel without a supervisor (New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, 2015). This is a major barrier and the community member explained that it is easier just to employ someone older who is going to be of more immediate value to his employer.

This same employer suggested that the minimum wage was another issue and that it is generally more cost effective to employ someone older nowadays as the wage bill is very little more, whereas historically "the apprentice was probably on \$100 a week and the tradesman might have been on \$300 again something, just makes it harder for them to get a foot in the door".

One standard practice was that young people used to get after-school work in the trade that they planned to enter as an apprenticeship. The work might involve sweeping the yard, but as one business owner suggested, nowadays health and safety require that anyone working has to be issued with safety gear, comply

with legislation and the whole thing becomes so onerous for the employer that it is generally easier just to do the task themselves. Another member of the community explained that apart from the big employers who operate shift work, there are mainly two or three person businesses and that, in this interviewee's opinion, the companies cannot employ young labour because of the supervision and requirement of the health and safety regulations. Garrett and Eccles (2009) explain that after-school jobs that are not having a detrimental effect and jeopardising school achievement are helpful for a young person. The work provides good opportunities to learn some employment skills and gain confidence in what is an informal employment sector. However, current employment regulations which are intended to safeguard the young employee may also be reducing the opportunities for after-school work experience. The young people are then more vulnerable to boredom and all the issues that are associated with "idle hands".

The Youth Empowerment Service (YES) is an organisation which operates as a youth support service. Due to Te Aroha's location on the boundary between Hamilton based services and those operating out of Thames, social support is not always easily accessible and YES helps to ensure a service provider is accessed when required. Another barrier that YES assist youth with is helping them to get a RealMe login as these are required by IRD but some young people do not have cell phones. Like many places there are socio-economic disparities but those families that are experiencing hardship, may not be being given a community helping hand.

Carson and Gardner (2012) report on the funding changes in Otorohanga. These changes mean that the existing funds which are available through the Ministry of Social Development will be targeted at youth at risk. A community member in Otorohanga expressed his concern about these and what implications there may be on the Trade Training Centre since funds have been given to support the school leavers transition period. The article discusses the irony that because Otorohanga has no 'vulnerable youths', the funding is cut and yet there were many social issues until the Trade Training Centre and Wintec created meaningful opportunities for the town's young population. In effect, Otorohanga will be victim of its own success. Whilst it is hoped that there will be sufficient funds to ensure that Otorohanga continues to support youth through the transition period, the question must be asked if funds are also going to be available to the more marginalised youth in Te Aroha. The researcher has not been able to establish what impact this may have on the industries based in Otorohanga but one of the in-depth interviewees explained that they have enjoyed the benefits of recently and well-trained young staff. It has also meant that young people in Otorohanga know that they have a good option which is likely to be a motivator.

### **Social capital**

As discussed in Chapter Two, social capital is the product of social relations such as trust, self-confidence and loyalty (Bassani, 2007) and these linkages are a resource that can be used for the benefit (or disadvantage) of the actor. The opinions of the participants from Otorohanga indicate that the residents have strong bonding and bridging social capitals. One of the examples of bridging that all the Otorohanga students commented on is that their community, including the local businesses, are very supportive of the college. As

Aimee from Otorohanga College explained “Yeah, the community’s always good because like backing the school, we have a lot of support from the community”.

The support can be for funding a sportsperson to attend a tournament outside the region or internationally. It can also come in the form of a member of the business community making sure that a young person has a place, even temporarily, to work when that person is considering their training options.

Te Aroha students also provided evidence that they have bonding and bridging social capitals. Caitlyn (Te Aroha) said “And also when I am working, I like to see people that I know coming in. It’s just quite welcoming I guess”. The other students also commented on the interaction between differing sectors of the community and within the school community. The school has a programme of the Year 13s mentoring the new entrants and this is another example of social capital in that meaningful links are being forged between groups that might not necessarily interact. The students explained that sports, in particular, provide a really good opportunity to mix with all ages of the community. The male students were strongly in favour of the summer sports tournaments, and whilst their enthusiasm was primarily directed at the participation itself, they did also say that they got the chance to interact with adults involved in the events. One of the student participants joined a photography group. The other members of the group were very much older but it did provide another chance for that young person to interact with another group within her community.

Returning to the situation of the young person whose family are unable to provide transport to sports practices, it is suggested that what was lacking was social capital. Of course the circumstances are not known, but if that youth

wanted to participate and the only barrier was transport, there is either a lack of financial capital and/or a lack of social capital. Sense of community is not a factor that could be converted for the benefit of that adolescent.

### **Social capital through school links to their town**

The town supports the school through a range of ways including fundraisers for sports teams. Several students explained that the town's businesses and individuals enjoy helping the students "You do see the adults thrive on helping the younger ones succeed" and that there are some businesses that are extremely generous "it's always the same businesses too", "Yeah, [they] genuinely care about them and want to provide support". The male students echoed this "everyone backs everyone to go far" (Jason, Otorohanga). The businesses provided support with sponsorship for community events and funding for students to attend regional, national and international level, cultural events. They all felt that this level of generosity aimed at helping the community would be unlikely in a city. Bottrell (2009a) suggests that social capital which links friends, peers, families and the local community enhances a sense of belonging which, in turn, helps the youth to be more resilient.

Te Aroha does not appear to have developed community social capital, which is where the neighbourhood has strong linkages through support networks (Bottrell, 2009a) to quite the same extent as Otorohanga. Nevertheless there are some good connections between the businesses and the town, and the students have found that the commercial enterprises are supportive of fundraisers. The businesses will give raffle prizes and as one student said "everyone gives" and business owners are involved in the governance of their town. The students may also not yet be aware of the level of support provided by the corporations, but it

does exist. As a community member explained, recently one of the large employers invited applications from young people who would be interested in an apprenticeship.

### **Conclusion of Findings**

Community members and the student participants in Otorohanga referred to their community as inclusive with no one knowingly excluded from society. The students commented that they feel secure and protected in their community. The Community Board representative suggested that the community's small population might be a contributing factor – and that if you want to socialise, there will be limited places and so everyone will mix. This may be the case but it also seems that everyone believes they are a community and acts accordingly. The young people who participated in the research indicated that they know that their town respects them, values them and will do everything to ensure that their full potential is reached. This potential may be fulfilled outside Otorohanga – the town recognised that the youth need to find their own place in this world and should go as far afield as they wish and only return if it is their choice. Otorohanga's model of economics which aims to ensure that employment is available appears to have been very successful with good social indicators, a buoyant commercial sector that is gaining from the quality of staff and a town that is enjoying the benefits of the economic success and the social cohesion. One community member explained that there was the deliberate decision to train local youth to alleviate staff shortages in the local industry and to provide a future for their young people. It was not explicitly mentioned that the decision was made in order to foster youth wellbeing, but it appears to have been achieved.

Te Aroha has some strong community links but it does appear to be more fragmented. Several of the students' comments related to the town having a strong community for older citizens. All the students feel confident that they have someone to talk to should the need arise and that they would know where to avoid

in order to protect themselves. The students' participation in sport has given them opportunity to interact with other people from within the town. Some of the research participants explained that one of these divisions is ethnicity. Māori are not being accorded the same opportunity to pursue activities using their cultural protocols and practices as the pākehā. A Māori member of the Te Aroha community explained that the reactivation of Tunitumi marae will help this. She also explained that one of the major drawbacks is that there are very few Māori living in the town on a long term basis that would be willing to press for a stronger say in the community. An example of this was when one of the reserves was being named. A suggestion was made that there are only a few roads and parks with Māori names. Most of the roads that have Māori names are named after trees where the Māori name is commonly used in New Zealand anyway (miro, puriri, etc). There is a lot of hope though that, in the near future, there will be increasing cohesion. This may well be led by the school which is using a range of initiatives to ensure that the entire school community is linked. In this regard, Māori may feel that they have a strengthening voice which will, in time, transfer to town.

Both towns' participants, the students and the community members, provided rich data to help answer the research aim of exploring the young people's perceptions of community factors involved in their wellbeing.

Although there is no doubt that Otorohanga has a very strong community, Te Aroha's also has many opportunities for connection. They have used these to create several strong communities with probable overlap between them. Te Aroha has some employers that hire seasonally, which may impact on transience and

which may hamper the development of community links, but the town makes a concerted effort to encourage community participation.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

This study has considered whether the strength of sense of community can have an influence on the wellbeing of adolescents. The researcher sought the opinions of students in their final year of secondary school to gauge their feelings about their town and how they felt that they were treated in places such as shops. The research was approached using a prosocial model. The reason for choosing this perspective rather than a deficit model (such as exploring all the risks) is because much can be learnt from studying a functioning model (Small & Memmo, 2004) and what is working in that environment. Another reason is that, in reality, most individuals are doing the things that are normally associated with a functioning society.

Data was collected from four focus group discussions and supporting as well as additional background information was provided through a series of interviews with pre-selected community members.

### **Findings**

Both towns have shown that they participate in actions that might encourage a sense of community. However the research question asks if sense of community has a bearing on the wellbeing of an adolescent.

Wellbeing is a combination of mental and physical wellness that ensure that the person feels able to cope in most situations. When someone has wellbeing, it means that they have a level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, trust, remain on task and feel that they are generally in control of their lives. Wellbeing in adolescence has been shown to help motivation, engagement and generally

means that a person is likely to rise to reasonable challenges and overcome them. Wellbeing has been shown to reduce negative and risky behaviours.

Otorohanga has demonstrated in a variety of ways that there is a sense of community. The student participants have clearly stated that they feel it. They explain that it is more than just everyone knowing each other, it is that the community will collectively care for people who, the community has established, need some help. The community does not want a person to be suffering in their town. As has been revealed in the literature review, theorists have established that sense of community is an emotion, a cognitive process, a geographical location, the accumulation of the interpersonal links, behaviour and the sum of all these factors and relationships. If we consider the homeless person, the question that is raised is if it is sense of community or another factor that results in the community mobilising to provide shelter, food and care for this person. Participating in prosocial behaviours and demonstrating civic care have been shown to encourage sense of wellbeing. Further, if a young person relates to the 'ideal' of a young person that is in general discourse, they are likely to feel an increase in their self-esteem.

Te Aroha College may also have a sense (or a developing sense) of community in that the older students are now mixing with the younger students and this connection is intended to be, primarily, for the benefit of the younger student. However, it may well also affect the older student who may gain by the same process as outlined in Otorohanga's example above. The student aligns with citizen-like behaviour which increases their self-esteem and that, in turn, increases their sense of wellbeing. One thing that has also been expended in this and the

first example though, is time and effort. These are actually resources and the sense of community has been converted to be used to help the homeless person and the younger students.

The Te Aroha example of the adolescent who is unable to attend sports practice and so may be forced out of the team, demonstrates another situation which poses the question of whether this is sense of community that is not helping or a lack of social connections that can be used. The thing that is required here is a lift to the practice. Since the family cannot take the adolescent, a contact (family, friend or neighbour) is required to help out. This contact would be converted into social capital. That facility is not available to the adolescent which suggests a lack of social capital.

Many of the male students in both Te Aroha and Otorohanga commented on the value of socialising with adults through the community-based rugby games. The female students also explained that they interacted with adults – such as through casual employment opportunities and working at community events as part of fund-raisers for their sports teams. The interaction with the adults is a form of bridging capital – the interaction is between two different groups of people which can then be used for the benefit of the person who has accumulated the social capital.

The students also commented on the fact that everyone knows everyone. Some of the Te Aroha students expanded upon this and explained that there were some people who would do things that might be regarded as socially undesirable. This might result in a removal of social capital. Returning to an earlier scenario, if a person is known to take drugs, any social capital they might have garnered

through their interactions on, say, the rugby field, might be negated because this deficit is effectively erasing any benefit. This raises a further point of whether one unit of social capital will have more weight (or power of negation) than another. The literature has not been reviewed for this answer but some of the participant's responses suggest that it might. For example, returning to the known drug user, if a negative drug test is known to be required in order to gain employment, it is suggested that the rumour/fact that this person takes drugs be enough to completely rule them out as a potential employee. Conversely, the well-known sportsperson who is afforded preferential treatment may also possess significant social capital.

The student participants probably were not representative of their cohort since they were high achievers as demonstrated by the fact that several of them held positions of responsibility within their schools. Another distinction is that several of the students now have their own cars, or access to a parent's car, and so, may not represent the general socio-economic distribution of their towns. Although it has been shown that financial capital does not have a major influence on wellbeing, other factors which are related to lack of financial capital may have an indirect influence on wellbeing. These include lack of access to seek support or inability to pay for further education. However, they did represent well-functioning adolescents and for this research project, since the focus was on a prosocial model, the risk factors that are associated with young people were not discussed during the focus groups. Learning of some marginalised youth was helpful though as the differences in circumstances helped to answer the research question.

Accounts by the students of their interaction with other sectors of the community suggest bridging social capital, and the many opportunities for linkage between similar people within the community is bonding social capital. The area where this seemed to be most evident was sport and, from what was stated, so long as a young person participates in, particularly, a team game, they will have connections *provided* for them. There will be many young people who, for one reason or another, do not participate in sport but they may have other forms of social capital – such as through their families, their work, their friends and their school as demonstrated through the research. They may also be highly motivated and convert their potential into human capital. As has been discussed briefly earlier, this will involve some form of investment by the actor.

It is argued that social capital is the main basis of any wellbeing that can be gained as a result of living in a close community. Bassani (2007) defines some conditions about social capital. These are that it must be converted into a useable resource, it has to be developed in prosocial relationships, and that bridging capital will strengthen the social capital.

As has been discussed above, the adolescents probably already have a high level of self-esteem since they were self-selected for the focus groups. Many were office-bearers in their colleges which suggests that they have demonstrated a high sense of responsibility. One particularly telling comment is that the Te Aroha students are assigned the task of supervising the bouncy castle at community events. This implies that the students are respected and will behave in a responsible and caring manner towards the children who are playing. This type of endorsement may be implicit but it may increase the students' sense of

wellbeing. The students did explain that the staff show complete respect and this may have benefits for the students' wellbeing indirectly. It is known that it helps them directly as the students explained that if they had a problem, they would have no hesitation in talking to a staff member.

The Otorohanga students did appear to find that the way they were treated, since they were generally treated very well, does seem to help them and reinforce that community feeling. In terms of the more direct influence on wellbeing which can be provided by the students perceiving that everyone is looking out for them, it is believed to add to their sense of wellbeing. Another important factor in wellbeing is that, because of the close association between the commercial enterprises, the college and the town's residents, the students feel that they have options. As one student explained, he has already been offered temporary employment before he enters training. As research has determined, this sense of security is an important factor in an adolescent's wellbeing. Like Te Aroha, the students explained that they are shown respect by the college staff. They can seek the staff's help in the knowledge that they are respected and this can have a direct influence on the student's wellbeing.

### **Limitations**

The researcher hoped to explore the comparison between Māori and Pākehā in this analysis of the two regional towns. She hoped that using an emic approach to consider if being Māori may have an influence on, or be an additional factor to, any potential sense of community. Since the Treaty of Waitangi is an agreement between the Crown and the chiefs of New Zealand ensuring that there would be a full partnership between Māori and Pākehā, it would have been entirely appropriate to consider this aspect. However it has not been possible as

the researcher has been unable to gain sufficient detail about Māori communities within Te Aroha. This is a serious and regrettable limitation of the study since, without having the in-depth information about Māori communities, it has been impossible to compare the two towns and gauge whether being culturally engaged could add an additional community link. It has also meant that any psychological factors that may be present as a result of inter-connection within a community cannot be considered in terms of their universality or if they are likely to be culture dependent (Smith et al., 2013).

The findings that have been presented in this thesis cannot be generalizable as the participants were not randomly selected. One of the prerequisites for the students participating in the project was that they were 17 years or older and so there is a strong chance that there was selection bias. Students who plan to follow further study are more likely to have remained in college for their final years and most of the students held high office and had responsibilities within the school. The students may not be representative of the youth population further afield or even within their own town. However they do represent the experiences of a specific group.

### **Further research**

The reduction in funding may have an impact on Otorohanga's youth training scheme. It is strongly recommended that a full evaluation is conducted to establish if this funding cut is going to result in a reduction in employable young people who are needed by the current industries based in Otorohanga.

This research has not considered the Māori viewpoint in regards to any of the key themes in equal detail. This is a limitation of the current study and it would be beneficial to learn if the key finding applies for Māori.

It is recommended that there is further exploration and action research of youth in Te Aroha that may be facing disadvantage.

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## Appendix one: Letter to Principals of the colleges

I am a student the University of Waikato and also work for Population Health, Waikato District Health Board. I am interested in researching adolescents' perceptions of their environment and what is likely to have a bearing on their sense of general wellbeing. This research is important in order to assist in understanding what can have a positive influence on young people. I hope to do research in this area for the thesis component of a Master's degree in Community Psychology. Would you please consider meeting with me so that we could discuss the research project and whether you would permit me to meet with small groups of your older students to gain some of their thoughts on Te Aroha?

The project will consider young people living in two regional towns, Te Aroha and Otorohanga. This topic has been selected to consider what community factors can help the navigation of the period from adolescence to adult. It is likely that most adolescents need support to do so and that help will come from a variety of sources. This research will consider those sources and whether the strength of the community can affect that support. The second part of the research will consider how the youth are viewed by other members of the community.

I believe that two focus groups may work well. The time and venue would be when and where was most convenient for the students but could, perhaps be after school is finished for the day.

This research will add to the New Zealand-based data that shows what a normal and functioning adolescent can respond well to and exploring what is going well for adolescents in order to further positive development. The research will also involve a review of the literature about the influences of the environment and how adolescents' wellbeing relates to function.

The reason why Te Aroha and Otorohanga have been selected as the research sites is that both regional towns have some similarities which may assist comparison. They both have similar numbers of students, distance from the urban centre of Hamilton and have a reputation for being "communities". The two colleges also have some distinct differences such as ethnicity composition and that Otorohanga College has a boarding facility.

All research done through the university has to be fully approved by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee, University of Waikato and any interaction that I do have with your students, would be in accordance with informed consent procedures.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

## **Appendix two: Letter to Community members**

I am a student the University of Waikato and also work for Population Health, Waikato District Health Board. I am interested in researching adolescents' perceptions of their environment and what is likely to have a bearing on their sense of general wellbeing. This research is important in order to assist in understanding what can have a positive influence on young people. I hope to do research in this area for the thesis component of a Master's degree in Community Psychology. You have been recommended to me as a member of the community who can provide insight on young people in your town. For this reason, I wondered if you would please consider meeting with me.

The project will consider young people living in two regional towns, Te Aroha and Otorohanga. This topic has been selected to consider what community factors can help the navigation of the period from adolescence to adult. It is likely that most adolescents need support to do so and that help will come from a variety of sources. This research will consider those sources and whether the strength of the community can affect that support. The second part of the research will consider how the youth are viewed by other members of the community.

This research will add to the New Zealand-based data that shows what a normal and functioning adolescent can respond well to and exploring what is going well for adolescents in order to further positive development. The research will also involve a review of the literature about the influences of the environment and how adolescents' wellbeing relates to function.

Te Aroha and Otorohanga are the two regional towns that I hope to study because they have some similarities, in size of student roll, distance from the urban centre of Hamilton and both have a reputation for being "communities". The two colleges also have some distinct differences such as ethnicity composition and that Otorohanga College has a boarding facility.

All research done through the university has to be fully approved by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee, University of Waikato and any interaction that I do have with your students, would be in accordance with informed consent procedures.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

## Appendix three: Recruitment poster for focus group participants

**Young people's perceptions of their town: Influence on well-being.**

I am a student at the University of Waikato and interested in young people and what they think about the town they live in.

I hope to meet with students aged 17 years or older in two groups. I would really like to hear from you if you would like to join one of them. The groups will be arranged with one being for male students and the other for females. The groups can range from about six to eight students. Each group's discussion will probably take about one hour.

I am particularly interested in things that are working well and how being part of a regional town, such as Otorohanga, can affect how you feel about yourself and your future. For example, I would really like to know what it is like for a young person living in Otorohanga (this might include – do you feel safe, are there enough things to do, if you had a problem would you know where to seek help, do you think the library has enough books).

**Important information**

- Anything that you say will be *non-identifiable* to anyone outside the group
- you will have full opportunity to pull out of the discussion at any point. I will give you all, as members of a group, a summary of the discussion (it will not be word for word and will not have your real name used). You will have two weeks to make any additional comments to what you said.

**I would really like to hear your opinions.**

If you would be interested in joining one of the two groups, please send me an email at [gcs5@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:gcs5@waikato.ac.nz). The time and place of the group meeting would be when and where it is convenient for you all.

You will receive a \$20 voucher to say thank you.

The reason why I have chosen your town as one of the two sites that I plan to learn about, is because it has the reputation for being a town with a strong community feel.

The reason why I have chosen students of the college is because you will know your town and how you fit into it. I will also be interviewing other members of the community but, because my research will be about young people, your comments will be the ones that hopefully will give me the greater level of understanding. I will talk to other members of the community who will give additional and background information.

*This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr James McEwan, email [jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz)).*

This research project has also been approved by the Principal of Otorohanga College

## **Appendix four: Information Sheets for focus group participants**

### Young people's perceptions of their town: Influence on wellbeing

I am a student at the University of Waikato and interested in young people and what they think about the town they live in.

#### Who may take part?

Any student at Otorohanga College who is 17 years or older.

#### What will participations have to do?

As a participant, you would join a group of about six to eight students. I am going to group all the female students together and all the male participants together. There will be no questions specific to males or females though.

Some young people live in towns that seem to help them do well; it may be because of good teachers, or a strong sporting community, or job opportunities, or some other reason. Otorohanga seems to be one of those towns. I would like to know why you think this is. I will ask you all one question at the beginning. That will be "What do you think are some of the good things and some of the negatives of living in Otorohanga?"

#### Why you?

The reason why I have chosen your town as one of the two sites that I plan to learn about, is because it has the reputation for being a town with a strong community feel.

The reason why I have chosen students of the college is because you will know your town and how you fit into it. I will also be interviewing other members of the community but because my research will be about young people, your comments will be the ones that give me a better understanding. The interviews with the other members of the community will be additional and background information.

#### What is the purpose of the research?

The key theme of the research will be gaining an understanding of youth's perceptions of their town and what they particularly find helpful to them as they look towards adulthood.

The project will consider young people living in two regional towns in New Zealand and what it is about their environment that is likely to have a bearing on their sense of general wellbeing. This topic has been selected to consider what community factors can help the navigation of the period from adolescence to adult. It is likely that most adolescents need support to do so and that help will come from a variety of sources. This research will consider those sources and whether the strength of the community can affect that support. The second part

of the research will consider how the youth are viewed by other members of the community.

The focus group will be a group discussion on topics which include:

- Do you see people in town that you or your family know? What do you think about that?
- Do you think it makes a difference to how you feel about Otorohanga from the way you are treated in shops?
- Do any of you hold a particular role in the school (such as captain of the rugby team)?
- What do you think about the types of things like community events that are held in Otorohanga?
- Are there some things that you don't like about living in Otorohanga?
- If you had a problem, do you know an adult that you would feel okay talking to them about it as you know they could help you?
- Can you tell me what you think about Otorohanga and whether it is really interested in the young people?
- Tell me about what it is like to be a young person living in Otorohanga. (the sorts of things, do you feel safe, are there enough things to do, if you had a problem would you know where to seek help, do you think the library has enough books, anything you like).
- Tell me about the types of activities that youth enjoy having in town. Is there anything that you have heard about in another town, that you would like here?

You might have other things that you think should be discussed, and you are welcome to raise these.

#### When, where and how long?

The time and place will be when it suits all the members of the group.

The discussion will last about one hour but will finish when everyone has finished saying what they wish to say..

#### Anonymity.

- You will all see who else is in the group and I will ask you all to not talk about what someone else has said after the discussion is finished.
- No real names will be used in the report – gender appropriate pseudonyms will be used. So for example if your real name is Jessica, you may be called Teagan, I may write Teagan, Otorohanga.

- Anything that you say will be non-identifiable to anyone outside the group and you will have full opportunity to either pull out of the discussion at any point, and will be able to add anything to the summary.

Additional important information.

- Everything that any of you say will be respected.
- There will be no difficult questions.
- You do not have to answer anything if you would prefer not to.
- You may leave at any time and you will still receive a voucher to the value of \$20.
- I will send you all a summary of what was said and you are welcome to add to it within two weeks after I have sent the summary.
- None of the questions that are going to be asked will be deeply personal and you are welcome to answer the question as you wish, or not answer the question. However, there is always the chance that something that someone says, can be upsetting or cause discomfort. For that reason, we list the following support services:
  - Depression Helpline 0800 111 757
  - The Lowdown free text 5626
  - Whats up 0800 942 878
  - Youthline 0800 376 633

If you would be interested in joining one of the two groups, please send me an email at [gcs5@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:gcs5@waikato.ac.nz) You will receive a \$20 voucher to say thank you.

This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr James McEwan e-mail [jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz)).

This research project has also been approved by the Principal, Otorohanga College

## **Appendix five: Information sheets for community members**

### Young people's perceptions of their town: Influence on wellbeing

I am a student the University of Waikato and interested in young people and what they think about the town they live in.

### Who may take part?

You have been invited to take part as a leading member of the Otorohanga community. Recruitment has been done by strategic selection in that I have been given the names of members who may be able to give me information about the town, its youth and their place in this town. I am also conducting focus groups with students of the college and some other interviews.

### Choice of location for research

The reason why I have chosen your town as one of the two sites that I plan to learn about, is because it has the reputation for being a town with a strong community feel.

### What is the purpose of the research?

The key theme of the research will be gaining an understanding of youth's perceptions of their town and what they particularly find helpful to them as they look towards adulthood.

The project will consider young people living in two regional towns in New Zealand and what it is about their environment that is likely to have a bearing on their sense of general wellbeing. This research will be looking at normal, functioning relationships. This topic has been selected to consider what community factors can help the navigation of the period from adolescence to adult. It is likely that most adolescents need support to do so and that help will come from a variety of sources. This research will consider those sources and whether the strength of the community can affect that support. The second part of the research will consider how the youth are viewed by other members of the community.

### What will participations have to do?

I would request an interview with you, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately one hour. I will ask you open-ended questions about:

- your role in the community
- what sort of situations you generally meet the young people of the town
- your perception of young people in the town

- if you have noticed any general changes over the years in the young people's attitudes – such as whether they wish to stay in the town or move on; if youth seem to have more/less aspirations; generally feel that they have a place in the community
- if you were one of those students, how do you think you would feel.

The interview would take the form of a conversation rather than a question and answer session.

Important points:

You will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you agree to be interviewed.

You are welcome to withdraw from the interview at any time.

You are welcome to not answer any questions.

Identifiability of participant

If you state you wish to be anonymous, I will remove any reference to your role although I will state the town. Please note that this cannot guarantee anonymity though.

I will send a transcript of the interview to you and request that you advise me of any changes that you would like made. I would request that I am notified of any amendments within two weeks of sending the summary to you.

Further information

If you would like any further information, please email me at [gcs5@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:gcs5@waikato.ac.nz)

Thank you very much for your consideration.

This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (Dr James McEwan e-mail [jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz)).

## Appendix six: Consent form for focus group participants



School of Psychology



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

### CONSENT FORM for students

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

**Research Project:** Young people's perceptions of their town: Influence on well-being.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.		YES	NO
1.	I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2.	I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3.	I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4.	I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty		
5.	I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
6.	I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
7.	I understand that this focus group discussion will be audio recorded.		
8.	I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.		
9.	I understand that a gender-appropriate pseudonym may be used in the report along with the town where I attend college. My real name will not be used.		
10.	I wish to receive a copy of the findings		
11.	I understand that I will be sent the summary of this focus group		
12.	I understand that I need to respond within two weeks of the dispatch of the focus group summary with any additions.		

#### Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Dr James McEwan, email [jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz))

Participant's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix seven: Consent form for community members



School of Psychology

### CONSENT FORM – community members



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

**Research Project: Young people's perceptions of their town: Influence on well-being.**

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.		YES	NO
1.	I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2.	I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3.	I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4.	I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty		
5.	I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
6.	I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
7.	I understand that this interview will be audio recorded.		
8.	I wish to have my name and role removed from the report. I understand that this may not guarantee anonymity.		
9.	I wish to receive a copy of the findings		
10.	I understand that I will be sent the transcript of my interview		
11.	I understand that I need to respond within two weeks of the dispatch of the transcript with any amendments.		

#### Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Dr James McEwan, email: jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz)

Participant's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_