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# Upside Youth Mentoring Aotearoa

A thematic analysis of routinely collected interviews with mentors, young people, and young people's whānau


July 2020

AUT

## Project team

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### Project development

Through discussion with PCR and members of the Upside Management Team it was agreed that a thematic analysis of existing, routinely collected interview data may provide an avenue to explore the effects of the programme on all involved. Upside provided all data for this analysis. Thanks to David Anstiss who provided the initial introductions, engagement, ethics approval and project design.

Preferred referencing format:
Terry, G., Collier, G., Cummins, C., & Kaye, N. (2020). *Upside Youth mentoring Aotearoa. A thematic analysis of routinely collected interviews with mentors, young people, and young people's family*. Auckland, New Zealand: Centre for Person Centred Research, AUT

## Report Summary

Upside Youth Mentoring Aotearoa is a community mentoring organisation specialising in the formation of supportive relationships between volunteers and young people aged between 9 and 13 years. A key focus for the organisation is an ongoing commitment to delivering excellent quality and tailored mentoring to young people. This document reports on a research project developed in consultation between Upside and the Centre for Person Centred Research at Auckland University of Technology to help further enhance their mentoring programme.

In the Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ) context, efforts to identify and build upon mana-enhancing, strengths-based approaches to working with young people is an imperative given the disparate experiences of many youth. This research drew on stakeholder interview data routinely collected by Upside. Interviews with young people, their whānau, and volunteer mentors were thematically analysed to offer insight into the impacts that the programme has on these groups. Five themes were produced from this analysis that are explored in detail in the extended findings section of this report. These themes were:

1) **Mentoring Coordinators are integral to the success of the mentoring relationship**. What became evident was the importance of a fully engaged mentoring coordinator to prevent mentors floundering. Upside's current framework handles this extremely well, but a formalised shift in focus (see recommendations) may further enhance the high quality service coordinators offer.
2) **Mentors negotiate a 'third relational space'** (neither friend, nor family, kid nor adult). Precisely because of its uniqueness, the mentoring relationship enabled evidenced change in young people. However, forming the relationship itself was complex, and this further highlighted the importance of advice of mentor coordinators and mentor peers.
3) **Mentoring relationships require time and consistency to fully understand the young person**. The twelve month period was essential to many of the impacts described by those involved in Upside's programme. Not least was the capacity of mentors to view the young people they worked within beyond the lens of 'at-risk', 'troubled,' or 'low-resourced.' This enabled them to bolster existing, important positive qualities already present in the young person.
**4) Change that occurs from mentoring is nuanced and needs specific language to describe it**. Mentors often needed support and insight from mentoring coordinators and mentor peers to recognise, appreciate, and give language to what occurred within the mentoring relationship. Change became more recognisable when whānau, teachers, mentor peers, and other external people drew attention to it.
5) **Mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial.** While the impacts of the programme on the young people themselves were evident, also important were the positive experiences of the mentors and the young people's whānau. All three groups spoke of depth of connection and improved lives as a consequence of their involvement in the programme.

A number of impact statements and recommendations for Upside have been drawn from the evidence within these themes, and will make up the next sections of this report.

## Impact statements

In this section, we will explore some of the specific impacts of the programme on mentors, young people, and whānau. Using the thematic narratives as an organising framework, we have identified a number of salient features of the Upside programme that will be important to focus on. Threaded through all of these themes was the importance of the Mentoring Co-ordinator to the mentoring process.

**Mentoring Coordinators are integral to the success of the mentoring relationship.**

1. Mentors had cross-cultural opportunities when learning about young people's cultural backgrounds and developed an appreciation of differences between themselves and those they mentored.
2. Mentors sense of altruism motivated them to apply to volunteer and this characteristic was extended as they pushed themselves to become better people.
3. Mentors demonstrated qualities of compassion, generosity, understanding, and self-discipline and role modelled these to young people.
4. Young people offered mentors a fresh perspective on the world.
5. Mentoring coordinators provide support and input that enables this new world to be more understandable.

**Mentors negotiate a 'third relational space'**

1. Young people have access to the support of an adult who sits outside their families and other social networks.
2. Mentors are able learn skills and gain knowledge associated with the care and support of a child.
3. The programme provides space for mentors to experience the world through the eyes of a young person, and engage in fun activities they might have ‘grown out of.’
4. The relationship, while difficult to define, gave something to everyone involved, even though it was complex to navigate at times.
5. The importance of the mentoring coordinators and other mentors to helping the mentors navigate and understand this relationship cannot be underestimated. They provided a framework for the relationship.

**Mentoring relationships require time and consistency to fully understand the young person**

1. The programme enabled mentors to view the young people they worked within beyond the lens of ‘at-risk’, ‘troubled,’ or ‘low-resourced.’
2. This mana-enhancing orientation occurred through time spent with the YP and their whānau.
3. Viewing the young person as someone ‘like them’ or similar to them, made access to positive change more viable.
4. Bolstering and affirming the good qualities of the young person enabled a higher level of support than expected, but these needed to be identified.
5. Trust between the mentor and young person was established through this mechanism of engagement over time.

**Change that occurs from mentoring is nuanced and needs specific language to describe it**

1. The shift from supporting the organisation and its vision to supporting the young person they were working with initiated a dramatic change of experience for the mentors.
2. The relationship and building of trust and connection is central to the success of the programme. Time and quality of time spent was what produced the greatest payoffs.
3. Positive change in the young people's lives seemed to be commonplace in the data. The depth of change seemed to be associated with the depth of relationship.
4. These changes seemed to be readily verified by young people, their whānau, and other important figures such as teachers and principals.
5. In order to help understand these impacts, often it would take someone external (often the mentoring coordinator, a teacher, or whānau) to identify the level of change in the young person.

**Mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial.**

1. Being able to give time to the young person allowed distraction and time out from mentor's own worries.
2. Mentors reported feeling like they had gained from the young person as much as they have given.
3. The mentoring relationship seemed to give mentors increased capacities in other areas, rather than drawing on these capacities.
4. Often the positive effects on the young person transcended them and spread to the young person's whānau. This unexpected bonding was considered important by both mentors and whānau.
5. Relationships between the whānau of the mentor and mentor sometimes developed as well, and often resulted in mutually beneficial support and connection.

## Recommendations for practice

- Close and enduring relationships are central to the success of mentoring in the young person's life, but also facilitate changes to the mentor. Highlighting the different quality and experience of the mentoring relationship over other types of relationships is essential to supporting all of those involved.
- Ensuring that reduction of social isolation and promoting human connections are emphasised as primary outcomes of the mentoring programme for mentors, the young people, and the young people's whānau.
- Drawing more clearly on the teina-tuakana framework for the relationship, actively using this language, and locating the work of Upside within Aotearoa/New Zealand's unique cultural context. Consultation with Māori advisors to ensure the best understanding and use of the approach would be essential.
- When collecting data with young people in future, it may be worth exploring child-centred interviewing processes. The data collected from young people in this project was a little 'thin.' Some of this could be related to the young people themselves, but we would suggest exploring options for routine data collection that go beyond asking questions designed for adults.
- Currently, the mentoring coordinator sits outside the core therapeutic triad of the mentor, the young person, and the young person's whānau (see Fig. 1). What is evident in the data we will discuss below, is the importance of the mentoring coordinator (MC). Shifting the paradigm to allow greater inclusion of the mentoring coordinator into the core relationship may allow for a much more cohesive and meaningful understanding of the practice of Upside (see Fig. 2). These figures are simplifications of the ways that the MC might be included into the relationship, and it is likely a much more nuanced picture could be developed over time.

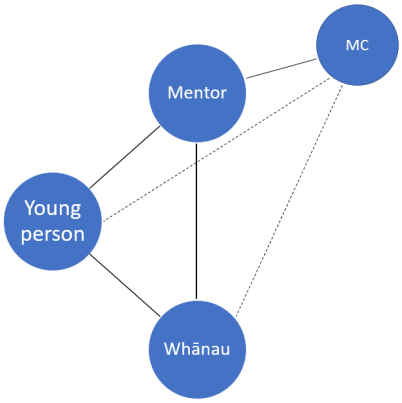


**Fig 1: Upside's current paradigm**

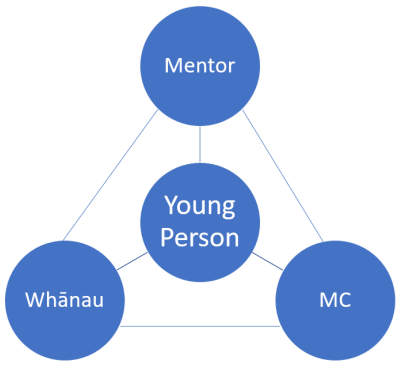


**Fig 2. Potential new paradigm**

- Drawing together the previous two points, inclusion of the mentoring coordinator more fully into the relationship will enable greater trust to be built up between MC, the young people, and their whānau. This will help ensure these relationships benefit from some of the same levels of trust and knowledge that enable the mentoring relationship to work. This will ensure better outcomes and higher quality data collection.

## Research Question

What kinds of impact do Upside's mentoring relationships have on young people, their whānau and volunteer mentors?

## Background

Upside is a community mentoring organisation specialising in the formation of supportive relationships between volunteers and young people aged between 9 and 13 years. A key focus for the organisation is an ongoing commitment to delivering excellent quality and tailored mentoring to young people. Mentoring is built upon relationships between young people and non-parental adults that are shaped by care, consistency, sustained companionship, support, and guidance over time [1]. Mentoring is also often identified as a mechanism to support young people in periods where social support and home environments may be reduced [2]. In order to ensure wider access to opportunities and engagement with the young person's potential, mentoring acts in a way that bolsters existing social support mechanisms, providing more resources for young people to draw upon. The social resources mentors can provide are of a different character and quality to those of peers and parents/guardians/whānau, and have positive ramifications for education and social achievement, as well as psychological wellbeing [3].

The purpose of the research was to help Upside Youth Mentoring identify aspects of the mentoring experience that have a meaningful impact on the lives of the young people involved in their service. Specifically, it aimed to better understand *how* Upside mentors make an impact on young people, particularly as it relates to life skill development and the impacts of enhancement of social support. These questions are important to further develop programmes and the training of mentors to "harness the positive power of these relationships" [4, p. 67]. Research evidence emphasises that close and enduring (i.e., for at least 12 months) relationships are part of what makes mentoring effective [3]. Therefore, helping give structure and stability to the underlying mechanisms of these relationship will help ensure more future impact. Certainly, in contexts where social isolation and disconnection from communities continues to increase, ensuring the benefits of mentoring programmes are maximised is of value beyond the individual lives of those in the programme [5].

The research drew on stakeholder interview data, which is routinely collected by Upside. Interviews with young people, their whānau and volunteer mentors were informed by an evaluation framework called the Circle of Courage, an indigenous model of positive youth development that focuses on young people's sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity [6]. In the Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ) context, efforts to identify and build upon mana-enhancing, strengths-based approaches to working with young people is an imperative given the disparate experiences of many youth, particularly those from within Māori and Pacifica backgrounds.

This report will present key themes from the data and make practical recommendations that will enable Upside to reflect on and further develop their mentors' service provision.

## Methodology and Methods

**Design:** This project uses a Qualitative Descriptive Methodology to explore the research question. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse routinely collected interviews, transcribed and provided by Upside Youth mentoring Aotearoa.

**Data and participants:** The interviews have been conducted and audio recorded by staff members of Upside and transcribed as part of the organisation's routine service evaluation processes. Interviews were conducted by Mentor Coordinators with young people who use the mentoring service, the young people's whanau, and volunteer mentors. Mentoring coordinators have experience in youth work and have worked to develop relationships with the young person, their whanau, and the mentor for upwards of twelve months prior to each interview. Data consisted of 48 interviews in total, 15 interviews with mentors, 15 interviews with young people's whānau, 12 interviews with young people. Upside's affiliate Springboard provided 2 mentor interviews, 1 whānau interview, and 1 young person interview.

**Data Analysis:** We drew on a qualitative method (that is, a narrative-based approach, as opposed to statistical representation of participant responses), which is common in psychology research and focuses on detailed accounts of people's lived experiences. Specifically, our research design was informed by a form of thematic analysis developed by Braun, Clarke and colleagues [7-9] who have proposed the following steps:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Familiarisation with the data: | A thorough reading and re-reading of the data |
| 2. | Coding the data: | Generating labels or 'codes' which describe or interpret key ideas in the data |
| 3. | Constructing prototype themes: | Clustering codes together that reflect a prototype of a larger idea or potential 'theme' that can then be tested. |
| 4. | Reviewing themes: | Checking themes for appropriate representation of the data, and are shaped to describe the data |
| 5. | Defining and naming themes: | Refining each theme and describing it in the context of the overall 'story' of the analysis |
| 6. | Producing the report: | Refining the overall narrative, weaving in extracts to illustrate key points and ideas |

These steps are recursive and iterative and help facilitate engagement and in-depth understanding of the dataset. The result of this analysis is a collection of themes, including interview extracts and researcher interpretations, that describe the key features of the interviews. Themes are understood as patterned meaning constructed from the data around a central organising concept.

These themes will focus on the impact of Upside's mentors on young people, the impacts of a non-parental adult relationship on their social support mechanisms, and the experiences and insights of mentors across a 12 month period. Where applicable, findings will also be linked back to Upside's chosen practice and evaluation framework, the Circle of Courage.

**Ethics:** This project was developed and conducted in accordance with The Auckland University of Technology's ethical standards and received ethical approval from AUTEC #19/357 dated November 2019. Within the application processes for this approval, data collected involved informed consent for interviews completed after the project began, and previous interviews received retrospective consent from parties involved to use these data.

*Terminology and reporting conventions:* The mentors in this report are referred to using pseudonyms, the young people receiving the mentoring support are referred to as 'the young people' or as the mentors themselves referred to them as 'their young person'. Family members [parent or guardian] are referred to as whānau. The supervisory team are referred to as the Upside (we have no demographics other than assumed gender).
[…] is used to indicate where dialogue has been removed.

## Extended Findings Narrative

The thematic analysis resulted in 7 candidate themes, which we then reviewed against the whole dataset. After discussion amongst the team, some themes were collapsed or realigned due to overlap and and/or a shared central organising concept, leaving 5 final themes. These themes were: 1) Stepping into a new world, 2) navigating a third relational space, 3) The unseen mechanics of mentoring, 4) Not just a troubled kid, and 5) Mentoring is about more than just the young person. Threaded throughout all of these themes was the impact of the mentoring coordinator and other Upside staff in helping navigate the complexities of the mentoring relationship. This thread has the capacity to create a paradigmatic shift in Upside's programme and will be emphasised through the theme titles and following analysis. We will now give more detail about these themes alongside representative quotes.

### Mentoring Coordinators are integral to the success of the mentoring relationship.

This theme captures the complexity of entering into a 'new world' through mentoring and the importance of a framework for mentoring practice. For both mentors and young people, the mentoring relationship offered time out from the everydayness of ordinary life, becoming a path into new experiences and possibilities. For mentors, stepping into this world involved an encounter with new situations, discomforts, and challenges. It involved coming into contact with a young person's perspectives and behaviours, but also with the wider context of their biographical history, relationships, family dynamics, and cultural background. For most mentors, this was outside their comfort zone and while interacting with their young person offered a fresh perspective on the world, it wasn't plain sailing. The

mentors sought support from the mentoring coordinator and other mentors to overcome challenges, help orientating, and becoming more comfortable stepping into this new world. Through this process, many mentors saw an opportunity to learn about and appreciate difference, and to push themselves to become better people. In this sense, stepping into a new world, and overcoming its many challenges with the support offered by Upside, enabled a kind of spiritual practice where the qualities of compassion, generosity, understanding, and self-discipline could be cultivated and put to good use.

> *This is a whole new thing for me. No, I mean I've never done anything like this before, so you know I was stepping outside of my comfort zone. (Olivia, mentor)*

Stepping into this new world was often described by the mentors as going on an adventure into another world, an opportunity to do something different and have experiences beyond their normal everyday lives:

> *Actually, being able to spend time outside of that what's another culture, that's really awesome because I get scared that I'm stuck in my culture scape. You know? Yeah, coz all my friends have, you know, are similar, like food, like you know, careers that we're doing, we get to go traveling. You know, whatever? We all stay in the same suburb pretty much. (Suzie, mentor)*

The novel experience introduced a feeling of uncertainty and unknowns. Some of the mentors were not familiar with young people and were unsure of what behaviour was normal or typical for people that age, for example:

> *I haven't spent too much time with young people in my own life. I was an only child and I suppose that's not kind of something that I would know. But it's not something that I would be like, 'Oh that's so normal.' (Natalie, mentor)*

The mentors recognised the experience was also new and strange for the young person and they also needed some time to become accustomed to this new person who was coming into their world. The young person was equally stepping into a new world, by being welcomed into the mentor's environment, meeting their family and friends. In this way, the relationship acted as a form of cross-cultural exchange, where some of the impacts of 'culture shock' were not always recognised:

> *I was just talking to my partner about it […] and realising actually she's eleven years old - no, she was ten at that time - she's actually ten or eleven years old. Just thinking back as an eleven-year-old, if you're hanging with someone that's over double your age it's like a new thing and you don't know what to say, so I think thinking about it from her perspective, and she is quite a shy and timid person as well, just giving her a bit of time and space. (Tessa, mentor)*

The mentoring was an opportunity to develop a relationship with a young person and their

family "*outside their normal circle*," from different cultural settings living in different parts of the city. To share experiences and learn about each other's values and beliefs. For instance, Olivia attended a formal event with her young person's family and community, which was unfamiliar to her and she felt apprehensive:

> *And so we couldn't understand anything and, you know, her dad doesn't speak much [English] and it's just so lovely to be invited into their culture and it was such a special occasion as well, we were all very humbled by this experience and I think was nice and for [her] as well to show her family and culture in more depth. (Olivia, mentor]*

The mentors often spoke of gaining a new perspective on their own lives and the developing appreciation for the different opportunities and advantages they had experienced. This allowed the mentors to draw on these moments of clarity, to bolster their commitment to support and enable the growth of the young person they were working with:

> *I just think it's given me a different appreciation for the kind of cards we're dealt in life sometimes. I think that when you strip everything back, you know everyone deserves the same opportunity and sometimes you can get caught up in your own world, which I know I think a lot. It's kind of reminded me, or given me this fresh perspective on, yeah that everyone deserves the same opportunity. (Olivia, mentor)*

Seeing and experiencing a different way of doing life helped the mentors understand their own world and the conditions that led to some of the struggles the young person experienced. For some, this meant an increased awareness of the elements of their lives they could be grateful for:

> *Just seeing the struggles they've gone through it's helped me understand a bit better about the poverty cycle and because obviously, she's got so many siblings and it's always quite noisy at home and that would with homework obviously she struggles to do her homework because it's quite noisy at home. I've gained a better understanding and also there were quite a few times when I went over and it was dark because they had run out of power and they were waiting for [parent] to pay the bill and just all of that going on affects the child, effects [their young person] and all their other kids in terms of learning. It all affects it. It was a good insight into a different kind of family and how they struggle to live in Auckland. (Tessa, mentor)*

For the whānau there was also some trepidation letting their young person into the care of a stranger. "*We didn't know who this person was for my daughter to hang out with" (Whānau).* However, they appreciated the opportunities the relationship offered for their young person to be exposed to new experiences and different lifestyles.

> *I hope [my young person] sees them and sees how they interact as a family unit. Yeah. Can bring some of those things back with her, and just use what it is to be the leading lady of a household. What it takes to be a good*

*mother responsible here, they're doing the right thing. Those dynamics are important for her to witness at this age. (Whānau)*

*It's positive influences, especially when like they mix and mingle with the families […] because [mentor] has got a partner and a mum, […] so she got to experience that and mix and mingle. You know the and also the flatmates, […] so as I guess it's broadening the horizons to be able to eyes, this, you know, to fit in. [whānau]*

The mentors took up the task of opening their young person up to new experiences, purposefully but gently taking the young person out of their comfort zone and presenting them with new adventures or challenges, exposing them to different opportunities, environments, foods, tastes and styles. This wasn't always easy but was typically framed in terms of opening up the horizons of the young person. Sometimes this was as simple as spending time in a different environment (such as the outdoors).

*it was so neat just her being more open to, and even just simple things. I feel like she was scared of a lot of things, just really simple things like […]. She didn't want to cross a bridge like one of those big bridges over the motorway. She was scared of that. She would tell me later on "Oh, actually I didn't want to because I'm scared" and maybe at first she'd be like "I don't want to, I don't want to", because it's quite big and it's over the motorway but after a bit of encouragement she will do it and I think even just those small things, I think that's been the highlight. (Tessa, mentor)*

As the relationship developed and the whānau members gained trust in the mentor they valued the support and different perspective the mentors were able to provide. Many whānau also commented on the value of their young person having a stable person in their lives who did not have to deal with the "background noise" of family dynamics. In some cases, the gender of the mentor meant that they could provide input otherwise missing from the child's experience. For instance, one whānau member commented:

*I'm a male I would just lose the plot – but when you've got a woman – the mentor talked to her quite a bit about that – so I'm quite happy (Whānau)*

The young people also noticed the different worlds, approaches and alternate ways of being that their mentor shared with them and introduced them to. Sometimes being intrigued by the differences in their worlds:

*Anytime we talk about when, she comes from America, just anytime, I think it's hilarious because there's a lot of cultural differences there like they quite like really fatty food like dipped in grease, food like that and I talk about it and she's like "Yeah, wasn't really into that" and she always grew up on a farm which is just so funny. To me, it's just so funny because I've always lived in suburbia and I just find it hilarious. (Young person)*

The exposure to alternate ways of being at times helped the young person overcome some of their challenges.

*Interviewer: Can you tell me something you've gotten really good at this year?*
*YP: Just like different words he's been teaching me like how, like before that's funny, because he's like taught me other words I can use to express my feelings (Young person)*

Stepping into a new world provided mentors with opportunities to experience compassion and empathy. "*I was actually quite worried about him and I've never worried about a younger kid like that before […] and that was quite cool" (Ryan, mentor)*. This new world gave them a different perspective on their own lives.

*I haven't had a lot of opportunities to spend time with kids in my life like I don't know any many children and the stuff they come up with its sometimes it's cool to have a different perspective you know. […] having the capacity to find joy and little things it's such an amazing trait which children have that you constantly sort of forget about as an adult (Anita, mentor)*

However, it was not all plain sailing and stepping into a new world bought challenges that the mentors were sometimes unprepared for and required explicit management.

*my expectations were so high because everyone in my group had connected so well and how they hung out all the time and they were so easy to get along, so when I actually was matched it just wasn't like that. I was a bit like "Ohh." That was the biggest challenge because I thought "Maybe she doesn't like me" and it was kinda like "I'm not sure if this is working" but I had to realise that every situation is different and also communication with the family was really tricky at the start […] I'd show up and she wouldn't want to come with me and that was quite upsetting to me. I remember that was quite upsetting. I remember her saying "I don't want to go" and kinda crying so that made me quite upset so that was quite a few challenges at the start. (Tessa, mentor)*

The support from Upside staff and other mentor forums was highly valued in assisting the mentors to develop strategies and work through the challenges to building a relationship with their young person and their whānau. Here the centrality of the mentoring coordinators to the process of becoming good mentors was highlighted. For instance:

*I think there were a couple of times when I was like "Uhhh, is it working? Should I bring it up with you guys?" but then I just thought I'd persevere. I did speak to [mentoring coordinator] over the phone and he was quite supportive as well so that encouraged me to go on. Because obviously, I'd never done it before. I've never hung out with too many eleven-year-olds one on one before, so I wasn't too sure on what to expect. After hearing the mentor supervision night about how everyone had such good matches I was like "Is this meant to happen?" But obviously in other supervisions later-on you hear about all these stories that have the same issues as you; so, you'd be like "Oh okay, it's normal then." Other people were going*

*through really similar things or more difficult situations than you. Puts into perspective. (Tessa, mentor)*

This support became integral when mentors realised that they did not always have a clear framework for understanding the type of relationship they were entering into or what sorts of impact they should be looking for. The mentoring coordinator helped normalise their experience and helped ensure the mentor didn't become stuck in their concerns. Although mentoring was something the mentors were invested in, it was not always what they expected it to be. The mentoring coordinators' experience and understanding of the mentoring framework – especially the centrality of the relationship, helped ground the mentors and highlight the change that was occurring and could occur. We will explore the specific and unusual relationship of mentoring in the next theme.

## Mentors negotiate a 'third relational space'

This theme explores the complexity of the 'type' of relationship that mentors experienced with their young person, and the importance of Upside mentoring coordinators to helping manage this. For most of the mentors, mentoring involved navigation of a relationship that was unlike any others they had previously experienced. Unable to come to this with an established familial connection or another understandable framing, the mentors, young people, and whānau often spoke of making sense of being neither friends, nor whānau. Although, initially the mentors thought of mentoring as 'hanging out' and providing a supportive adult relationship for the young person, the relationship was often more than this. The mentors spoke of having to be confidants, and encouragers, models of behaviour, but also occasionally having to enact some degree of discipline or boundary setting, without the moral authority ascribed to parents or caregivers. Across the course of the twelve month programme, the relationships often developed a degree of intensity, and this intensity often crossed beyond the young person, and into relationship with the wider whānau – particularly the young person's parents – or resulted in the young person's inclusion in the mentor's own family activities. The navigation process associated with the mentoring relationship did not seem to result in too much complication, but often involved 'living in the tension' of an unfamiliar, unusual type of relationship. This often made the mentors cautious or concerned about overstepping or crossing boundaries. This would typically mean that the YP would experience an adult relationship and resource beyond anything that they had otherwise experienced.

Without any prior connection or shared experiences to draw on, and despite considerable differences in age and life experience, mentors and young people found themselves having to navigate a new and complex relationship together. Mentors described how getting to know their young person required a considerable amount of effort.

*And it's amazing when you sort of just have two people come together and you have to sort of, you know, journey, go through […]. [It's] to be expected with strangers to each other, [to] have to work, work hard initially. You kind of say, 'Okay how do you kind of break down the barriers and get to know someone that you [have] no idea about, the family or anything like that.' (Olivia, mentor)*

> *It started out pretty good, we are sort of new to each other. We were excited to get to know each other and then after a little while, I feel like we went through a dip, because there is that period where it takes time, and especially with [young person], it took a long time to get to the stage where you can just talk about anything. It doesn't really matter what you talk about. (Sam, mentor)*

Without an appropriate or familiar framing, both found it difficult to communicate the nature of this relationship to others. This has been a common thread in research on mentoring and was certainly present in the Upside data. For instance:

> *It's not as a kid. It's not as an adult. It's somewhere in between. It's a very complex scenario (Neil, mentor)*

> *It is a weird and awkward thing to go do, to go hang out with someone you don't know twice your age. Well, more than that three times your age, four times your age, and just I guess at the start she struggled with how to communicate who I was (Anita, mentor)*

Sometimes the young person drew analogies with existing relationships to try make sense of how the mentor was involved in their lives and the types of support they offered:

> *She would say comments like, we've got a sister relationship. She'd say: 'we're like sisters.' (Claire, mentor)*

Mentors and young people who identified as Māori sometimes used Māoritanga as a reference point for connecting and relating to each other:

> *She has used her big family as a reference point having lots of siblings as a reference point for how her relationship can look with Maria [her young person] She has used her Māoritanga as contextualise for how to connect with Maria. Because Maria is also part Māori. So, yeah, she's used. She's really brought to the relationship who she is. I commented about the fact to Lisa, that you know I don't get a sense you know sometimes, cous she kept referring to [young person] as her little sister. And I was quite interested in that statement because I haven't really heard too many mentors refer to the young person in that kind of relational way. Oftentimes it's the young person speaking of the mentor that way, not the mentor speaking of the young person that way. So, I found that really interesting. And so, I kind of gravitated towards the whole kōrero around, around family. [from summary for interview with Lisa]*

In this particular case, the use of the teina-tuakana relationship was drawn upon to help make sense of the connection experienced. This seems to suggest that Te Ao Māori may provide more resources to describe non-parental adult relationships than Pākehā perspectives. Here the relationship, while described as 'sisterly' one, draws on the notion of being a guide and a support that is central to the teina-tuakana relationship [10].

Mentors also developed strategies for communicating with friends and family about who the younger person was, and what this meant for other aspects of their lives:

> *And then when people are like, so what are you up to this weekend? And like, ABC tonight? Yeah, I will say 'I hang out with my little kid'. He's like what? She's my little person, not my little kid. Yeah, that kind of like starts a conversation. Yeah. And then they're generally interested but yeah. (Suzie, mentor)*

However, navigating what it meant to be the younger person's 'mentor' was often emotionally challenging, particularly in the early stages of the relationship. There were times the mentor would be treated like a friend, or confident, and others when they were positioned almost as a pseudo-parent:

> *[At camp] It got to the point where I felt like I was the annoying adult and she didn't want to hang out with me. And so that side of it, I felt a bit sad, like she didn't want to hang out with me. […]. I mean that I feel that maybe even though she barely spent any time with me in the camp, she was focused on everyone else, she still knew that she had me to come back to if she needed to, so there was that sense of safety for her to come back to, which allowed her to say "Yes." Her mum wasn't there, she didn't know anyone -- like it's that scary new thing that there's no one there that she felt safe with, but she realised that with [my mentor] I feel safe, and so because I feel safe I can now be myself. […]. It was like a slight feeling of rejection. I'm so used to this level of interaction with us. And yet I was being pushed away. (Natalie, mentor)*

While it was assumed that mentoring would involve providing the younger person with guidance and support, mentors were not always sure where the boundary of their role ended and that of the parent's began. Mentors would identify opportunities for the younger person's personal growth and development, but tended to be cautious about overstepping a boundary. Within the interviews it was common to hear similar accounts to those presented by Ellie:

> *There's probably things that I've identified that she needs to work on but then I like I didn't know if that was appropriate to bring out with her. (Ellie, mentor)*

These risks to boundary crossing were especially pertinent when having to manage 'poor behaviour' on the part of the young person. Enacting some degree of discipline in the mentoring relationship was particularly complex, as some mentors worried that this could be seen as disrespectful or going too far. Challenging the young person or being someone they could ask difficult questions could also be complicated:

> *And I've always worried like, I've been like, Oh, you know... I want to... So, I want to be able to say, hey, let me maybe we can give you a challenge.*

> *You can […] say please and thank you. Like hey, why don't you ask me questions, but then I didn't want to disrespect to mom. (Ellie, mentor)*

Mentors were aware that a boundary existed, but were not exactly sure where it was or how to avoid crossing it. As a result, they described having to continuously learn and negotiate how to 'be' around the younger person as an adult who was neither friend nor whānau. This learning by doing approach could be enhanced or modified by confirming direction with the mentoring coordinator, but ultimately it still involved continual modification moving from 'real life' to 'mentoring life' and back again.

> *You have to modify your attitude for a kid who doesn't have to be there, if you're having a grumpy day with your kid, if you had that same attitude with a kid who doesn't have to be there – wouldn't work too well (Robert, mentor)*

Mentors were aware that their role involved 'being the adult' in the room, but they also had to keep the young person onside to maintain a sense of trust and connection. Mentors often struggled to walk this fine line, particularly when dealing with challenging behaviour:

> *So there was it was a it was a bit of a struggle at I think it's one of those ones as well we go. Okay, so how am I going to react to this? Am I going to react to it like I'm parenting? Or am I going to give them a little bit more of a leeway although there how's it going to make [my daughter] behave or see it? (Neil, mentor)*

The mentoring coordinators were central to managing this line, and would often be checked in with. Some mentors would also go to directly to the whānau of the young person to ask how they would manage the behaviour in question:

> *But she was just really closed off. And I was worried, because I wasn't sure if she did this at home? And how home would deal with this? […] So yeah that was a bit of a challenging situation and I ended up discussing it with her mum, asking her, "What would you do in that situation?" And she told me. (Natalie, mentor)*

When this occurred, there was often a balance between working for the young person, and not 'ganging up' on them. The same was true when the roles were reversed. Some mentors were acutely aware that their involvement in the young person's life had the potential to create friction or conflict within the family. As one mentor explained:

> *[She] would share with me that Mum would say: "you do that with [your mentor], not with me" and "[your mentor] takes you to that". Like kinda jealousy. I shared this with [upside staff]. And so that was a challenge for me because obviously I don't want to cause any friction between [young person] and her Mum. I don't want to be seen to be doing better than her Mum, or anything like that. (Claire, mentor)*

The mentors acknowledged there was some risk they would end up taking on a 'fun parent' role, or a relationship that created jealousy. Some developed strategies for managing this in

the relationship, explicitly needing to articulate that being a mentor did not involve displacing the parent:

> *The way I dealt with that with Abby [my young person] was to say, 'We need to support Mum's decisions, we need to respect Mum'. Abby was kinda comparing me to Mum. So, I would always make sure I was 100% on Mum's side. 'You are living with Mum, you have to respect Mum', all that sorta stuff. (Claire, mentor)*

The ambiguous nature of the relationship meant that mentors had to learn how to be around and relate to their young person in multiple contexts, with different rules and norms. Bringing the young person into their family environment presented some challenges in this regard, as the norms of their home environment were different to those of the young person's. For example, some mentors would respond to challenging behaviour by saying things they would ordinarily say to their own children, only to find this strategy ineffective with their young person:

> *When we went to the movies, this is about four or five months ago, and [my partner] got tickets to the Lego Movie. And so he came and he's had about three or four outings with us as a family which I said to [my partner] not too often but a little bit. It's quite cool when he gets on well with [my daughter] which is neat and then there was something where he got a burger and it was the wrong one and then by the time the next one came along, he'd eaten all the chips and all that stuff and then he didn't need either the burgers and I said something like, 'you need to give, to at least try to eat something even if it's just a couple of bites'. And because it's exactly what I'd say to [my daughter]. It said there's nothing, but he just went rummm... It just real quiet. (Neil, mentor)*

For many of the mentors, these kinds of interactions were rarely reported in the interviews, but only served to emphasise the qualitative difference between mentoring and their other relationships. Maintaining consistency, and time spent with the young person meant that many of the pitfalls and concerns were navigated. Supervision and conversations with other mentors further helped normalise this third relational space, enabling the mentor to see more of what the role enabled them to do and be in the life of the young person. These people outside the mentoring dyad helped give language to explain and describe the relationship.

The unusualness of this third space also had an impact on the ways in which whānau viewed the mentoring relationship. For example, whānau described the mentoring relationship as feeling more authentic than other services, such as social work, where the person is paid as part of their job:

> *And this is the huge difference of seeing between government, departments, CYFs, OT, any government. [It's] personal. They have a job to do and the difference between that and a mentor is that the mentor has job to do, but it's a job of their choice, on their time (Whānau)*

Whānau viewed mentors as inhabiting a space and role where they were not quite family, and not quite social workers, but somewhere in between. Because mentors were spending their time and energy voluntarily, whānau tended to see the mentoring relationship as 'real' and 'personal', creating what one interviewee described as "[a] bond that no government department can build." In the next theme, we highlight the ways that this growing relationship enabled mentors to see beyond the trope of the 'troubled kid' and to begin appreciating their young person in greater depth.

## Mentoring relationships require time and consistency to fully understand the young person

In this theme, we explore how mentors developed a deep appreciation of the young person as a whole person with intrinsic worth, often in ways that challenged pre-existing ideas and assumptions about younger people in need of mentorship. By getting to know their young person over time, mentors came to understand difficult or challenging behaviour in the much larger context of the young person's life and upbringing, cultural background, circumstances, etc. Mentors also spoke of how the young person's more positive traits, characteristics, qualities, or strengths would shine through at certain moments, giving them a deeper and more holistic picture of the young person. These traits were often seen as elements to focus on and bolster, creating opportunities for reinforcement and a sense of positive achievement. Pre-existing characteristics of the young person such as conscientiousness, generosity, and competence would be referred to as places of growth and capacity. At points, the mentors would be almost surprised with the ease of engagement with the young person, allowing the relationship to flourish and be less of a draw on emotional and cognitive energy. One of the key ingredients to this kind of change occurring was developing insights into the context via conversations with and observations of whānau. Important to this theme was the sense of mentors wanting to 'make a difference.' While this drove initial engagement with the young person, it became less central as the relationship flourished.

Mentors described 'getting to know' their young person through the activities they engaged in. This allowed them to see how the young person behaved in a wide range of different situations and contexts, leading to deeper insights into their personality. As one mentor explained:

> *As time went on and we did a bundle of activities together and I got to know him better, and I realised he really struggled socially and struggled to interact with people. (Sam, mentor)*

Over time, mentors identified their young person's strengths and other positive qualities, and these were often talked about with a sense of pride or admiration:

> *I do feel like she's beyond her years in terms of connecting the dots around things, she's quite investigative and look for the reason around things. She'll question why and stuff. And I know she's 14, but I feel like she's beyond her years in that sort of stuff. I don't know how to put into words but yeah (Claire, mentor)*

*And seems that she's got quite a good emotional awareness around and you're treating people with respect and people know when they're crossing the line? Yeah, even though she is very reserved and why she's got bit of an old soul to her (Ellie, mentor)*

The mentors would then often be able to draw out or try and bolster these kinds of traits as part of their practice. As their relationship developed through the mentoring programme, mentors gained a deeper understanding of their young person, their life circumstances, and upbringing, and how these might shape behaviour in particular ways.

*Well it's just that, it didn't grind my gears, but that's just what she's seen so that's all she knows (Beth, mentor)*

Mentors also expressed that it was sometimes difficult to know whether challenging behaviour represented anything other than 'kids being kids':

*And I don't know if that's a 14 year old girl like teenage thing, or if it comes with age, but what I worry about with her is if things were to change and that continued on into her young adult lives. (Ellie, mentor)*

However, ultimately, the mentoring programme enabled mentors to view the young person beyond the narrow lens of 'at-risk', 'troubled,' or 'low-resourced.'

*I'm just trying to think. He's, I think just in general at home like he, he's not, he's not a born out of the gate, a naughty kid. You know, he's, he's actually quite conservative and a lot of what, you know, like he's very respectful towards his mum. And although him and his sister have a bit of a play up sometimes. But like he's not, he's not outwardly naughty (Neil, mentor)*

*When I first started [with Upside], you know, I thought I was going to be like, put with a lot of troublesome kids, you know, like a lot of family issues. Like, things going on, like not going to school. I mean, at first I met [young person], and was like oh wow he comes from a nice family home. But then right like now, I see that he's actually like his father. His relationship with his father is quite hard. His father is a hard guy. You know, he doesn't show up, which is fine. You know, not many men you know, it's all personality. Yeah. (Ryan, mentor)*

Mentors often tried to understand and empathise with the young person as a 'whole', and to see things from their perspective. Instead of significant events (being suspended or expelled) being viewed as indicative of all there was to know about the young person, the complexities of navigating different contexts for *all* children would be highlighted, and even recognised in their own childhoods. For instance, Peter commented:

*I was only with [young person] for two weeks when he got expelled from his intermediate school, and he was going into summer break, before he was starting his new high school and I was really anxious for him starting the new high school. Probably because for me HS was such a huge shock to my system going from one culture to another culture and I didn't really... it*

*was big for me... and I know how many people got kicked out of HS because they couldn't make the adjustment. (Peter, mentor)*

Similarly, Natalie was able to recognise the emotional intensities of being a young person needing some level of support and immediately relate to it:

*And I just got quite emotional seeing her do that […] It was really upsetting for me to see her like that, when I had never seen that before [...] I could relate to some of what she was experiencing – I thought if I was her feeling that way what would I need how would I … I've been in situations in my past where I was in that really heightened emotional state and I didn't have people to do that for me, so I suppose it was easy to be --- well not easy -- but I thought if I was her feeling that way, what would I need? How would I appreciate being approached? (Natalie, mentor)*

Because mentors were able to see and bring out the best in their young person, they tended to have a generous reading of behaviours and traits that others might see as problematic or undesirable. One mentor put it this way:

*And yeah, there's... sometimes his confidence... People will see it as arrogant, but a lot of it is him, wanting to get to know people. And so, sometimes he'll push their buttons a little bit, just to see where he stands with you a little bit, but he's got a real good heart! (Peter, mentor)*

In interviews, whānau members expressed their appreciation for the ways in which mentors had developed this deeper understanding of the young person and their context:

*He has an understanding of where he is coming from […] he kept going on about how's it going with your schoolwork, he kept perking him up you see. And when he wasn't going to school, he kept saying "oh well that's a shame." So he* had people that kept his back up *[…] He kept saying 'are you back at school yet?' you gotta go back to school (Whānau)*

*[she] has a real genuine interest in [my child]'s wellbeing and development […] She's not just another person (Whānau)*

The treatment of the young person as more than a number or an idea of a young person, but a developing individual with potential and existing strengths seemed to be core to much of the successes of the programme. These kinds of elements were especially important given that for all involved, it wasn't always clear how mentoring seemed to 'work.' We will focus on the underlying mechanisms of mentoring in action in the next theme.

## Change that occurs from mentoring is nuanced and needs specific language to describe it

The mentoring relationship initially was constructed around regular meetings and participating in planned activities. As the mentoring relationship developed into one where the mentor and young person become at ease with / comfortable and enjoyed each-others company [a genuine connection] the activities became less important and the effort of

building and maintaining a connection became less visible or onerous. The mentors talked about the naturalness of this connection describing it as genuine or 'real,' and this being the source of a lot of the positive change they and others would witness in the young person's life. In many cases what this relationship achieved, and how, was extremely hard to pin down, with whānau, and other important figures (teachers, principals) expressing surprise about the differences evident in the young person's life. Young people would also have some difficulty explaining the impacts on them (e.g., "she's very social and I think it's just rubbed off on me"). There were a number of descriptions of whānau attempting to understand and even replicate some of the mentor's patterns of behaviour due to these successes. Mentor's own explanations of the mechanics of what had occurred were often vague, with references to the intangibilities of what occurred in meetings with young people (ensuring fun, time, trust in the relationship, building on small gains). The bond that had been developed and the sense of ease in the relationship created spaces for openness, sharing, and opportunities to flourish. Often it took the supervision sessions and discussions with other mentors for the mentors to be able to put language to what had occurred within the relationship. It was in these interactions that the mentors could strongly connect with the changes they hadn't always noticed in their young person.

The mentors described the efforts they made to set up their routine of weekly visits and plan interesting activities to do with their young person. The commitment to meet weekly initially appeared daunting and sometimes was experienced as burdensome. Fighting traffic to get across town and keep their appointment time after a busy workday contributed to the challenge. The mentors also had other people in their lives who they needed to accommodate. They spoke about making adjustments to their lives to fulfil the commitment they had made to the organisation.

> *I think the hardest part was literally the beginning for any number of reasons. But just even at home with [my partner]. I think she took a few weeks to understand how it was working. We've got kids at home. So, you know, and aren't you mentoring them kind of at the same, you know, as usual. (Neil, mentor)*

Although initially this commitment was made to the organisation as the relationship evolved the mentors recognised their commitment was to the young person.

> *I didn't want to let her down we were building this relationship and it was awesome, we had fun together and I had committed to a year of doing this so that was a no brainier I wasn't going to pull out. (Claire, mentor)*

The mentors worked to establish a relationship with their young person. The shared experiences of the activities helped build this connection. *The best memory is when we went camping with each other because we got closer (young person).* However, for some dyads this was more challenging and required explicit efforts from the mentor to find ways to make a connection.

> *It developed quite slowly and it first I was a little bit unsure but I think really really slowly it happened and I think it really helped that I felt like - I think she was really really shy towards me and I think the fact that I tried*

*to connect with the family first, just being around the family first, I stayed around at her place and then slowly I gained her trust. But I think that over that time, just kinda slowly feeling that she's trusting me more or more willing to talk to me, be a bit more open. (Tessa, mentor)*

For others the initial connection was reportedly easy, which they attributed to the novelty of getting to know someone new. One mentor likened it to a '*honeymoon phase where you are obsessed with each other' (*Natalie). They noticed the relationship was constantly evolving and sometimes dipping into a lull. Continuing the relationship required persistence from the mentor.

*It took a long time to get to the stage where you can just talk about anything. It doesn't really matter what you talk about. It didn't feel like he and I had a lot in common. I didn't feel that way anyway, and because of that, after the first couple of months, I feel like we went through this lull where we weren't really comfortable enough to sort of chat away like old friends because we didn't have specific things to talk about. (Sam, mentor)*

The relationship was at times experienced as intense and demanding. Typically the mentors would have to identify what was at the heart of some demands,

*I might be 10 minutes late, it's a: 'why, what took you so long?' And you've got to turn it around to be it's because she really is looking forward to this, not the fact that she's doesn't realise I have a life outside and that I work [Monique, mentor]*

The mentors spoke about feeling pressured to be more available to their young person who would be frequently asking about their next meet up.

*But this is, you know, just that I look forward to Tuesdays at 3:30. But it scares me a little bit. Is he gonna have fun today? You know, is it all going to work out cool? We've hung out like 40 times probably, it's always fine. So, of course it's going to be fine, but it doesn't stop me from going 'is it going to be fine?' (Neil, mentor)*

Events in the young person's life also impacted on the relationship, and the mentor worked to overcome their own feelings to maintain their commitment for regular visits.

*There was that month where I was just banging my head against a brick wall, I really don't enjoy seeing him each week because of that negativity in those moments I did think to myself 'am I going to carry on?' (Sam, mentor)*

The support the mentors received from the group sessions and Upside staff, especially the mentoring coordinators, was valued to get them through these challenging times and develop strategies to cope and persist with their commitment to the relationship.

*I'd go home from a session and I'd be like - Oh well call [upside staff] and she'd be like 'its ok you just need to listen'. For me the challenge was hearing that and knowing what to do with that. (Ellie, mentor)*

As the connection developed and the young person and mentor become more comfortable in each other's company, the activities became less important. Being together and spending time with each other *'hanging out together'* was frequently recognised as the highlight of the experience by both the young person and the mentor. This was often discussed in terms of the cost of various activities reducing as the activities became more relationally orientated:

> *We've gone to the beach, probably the thing that we've done more than most regularly is like going to the beach or the pool. But I think it's like, often we're just hanging out and it's, it's in those moments that are like in the car, like you're driving somewhere and then something comes up you just talking and you might be able to offer like a bit of advice or whatever. So it's not, it's not necessarily the activity, it's just spending time (Andrew, mentor)*

The young people appeared to appreciate *hanging out,* often also with the mentor's friends and family, joining in on their mentor's family activities, '*helping with the cooking'* or just sharing meals together. One mentor spoke of the handmade 'mothers' day' card she received from her young person:

> *I think it's just a reminder that how you can put in a bit of effort – because at first, I was thinking I'm not really doing that much you know. Yes, I'm scheduling some time out of my day, but I don't feel like I'm doing that much really. But you know, it's amazing how much this can make a difference. (Olivia, mentor)*

However sometimes the mentors were concerned that they needed to be doing more than *just hanging out* together worried that this was not making the most of their time or benefiting the young person:

> *I guess, just trying to trying to add some value to what we do to a time in terms of use, it's good to sort of take him away from his home for an afternoon  give his gran some time, chill out, let some of them but […] because it quite easy he comes to our place was from lunch or something and then here we get busy playing with my boys, but its I'm just trying to get him to do something that involves a bit of a bit of a challenge or something (Robert, mentor)*

The mentors also spoke about the anxiety they sometimes experienced, concerned that the young person was enjoying or benefiting from their meetings. Others worked through this, by recognising that they didn't always need to be doing adventurous or unusual activities, instead learning to be confident that what they were doing was the right thing.

> *Every now and then you'll find yourself stuck in your head thinking "oh is he even liking this?" […] just reminding myself of the perspective of simplicity! And the mini golf thing reminded me "don't over complicate it, just simplify" It's all about the relationship and fun and having a laugh. (Philip, mentor)*

The regular commitment to meet up and do things together helped develop a genuine connection. The mentors formed an appreciation for the young person and began to recognise what they could offer (see previous theme):

> *I could see the relationship developing and I could see what an awesome kid she is and how easily influenced she is [...] and I could see that I could be there to help (Claire, mentor)*

Over the time the mentors noticed small positive changes in their young person such as, composure and increased confidence, although these were sometimes difficult to articulate, and there was no obvious explanation for how these had developed:

> *Because with [young person], it's not as simple as that because you don't necessarily see too much of a change. You know what I mean? I'm like I see him at the window, that was that was a big thing, this is - hey he's looking forward to seeing me - that's cool! You don't give him a lot sometimes from them to get a feel whether they're, getting anything out of it apart from the fact that you're tuning up every week (Neil, mentor)*

The young people reported how the mentoring had impacted their lives. Sometimes it was the exposure to new experiences, learning to feel more comfortable talking to others, or even liking different foods, but often it was just witnessing a different way of being. In some cases, the third relational space described in theme 2 might be seen as the source of this change:

> *YP: It's when like I've just changed somehow*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah can you give me an example of when you were?*
>
> *YP: I remember last year, well 6 months ago I wasn't that kind to kids like [who ask] 'oh can we play with you?' [I'm like] 'No. Big kids only' and now – 'come play if you want, I don't mind'*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah that's cool like what made you want to change that like I'll include them?*
>
> *YP: Just following what [mentor] does (Young person)*

Whānau also appreciated the opportunities the mentoring offered their young person even when the benefits were intangible '*It gives him time to find himself' [Whānau]* or difficult to attribute specifically:

> *She has grown quite a bit in the last 12 months. Absolutely. Yeah. I don't know where it's stemmed from exactly, but um, maybe it's just the age that she's at (Whānau)*

They valued the care and investment in their child. Noticing changes in the young person over the year, commenting on the openness, increased confidence, positive changes in attitude they had witnessed.

*She's more resilient […] she bounces back so much. Before when she'd get angry she'd stay angry for a long time but now she just brushes it off now. This year she's come a long way, she really has. Last year she wasn't too confident. She got bullied at school and it was a terrible year for her but this year she's doing really well. (Whānau)*

The young person having greater capacity to handle difficulty seemed bound up in the extra support they received. Having an extra set of ears outside of family and friend networks seemed to enable the young person to face things they had otherwise had difficulty with. Outsiders also commented on changes they had noticed in the young person they attributed to the mentor relationship.

*I spoke to one of the teachers who said [the young person] is really, I don't know what you're doing with that kid but its working […] because he's smiling now he's singing in assembly he'll say hi to you when you say hi to him and he never used to do that. (Sam, mentor)*

There were also other unexpected impacts of the mentoring relationship which the whānau commented on. In this example, the mentor and young person would regularly communicate via text however the whānau noticed how the young person struggled to structure his replies and they were able to use this as a learning opportunity:

*One of the things I want you to know is how well [young person] has started to construct his ideas, and his grammar and to leave his ideas of space between his ideas. So when you look at his replies. Yeah, it just that wasn't normal for him. […]all you got was this great big 100 words all jammed together you know, with different ideas all over the place and then we split them up so being able to text as well was also good for his English and construction of his ideas and comprehension. What's going on and that has developed as you see through the text. So you can see the difference because [his mentor] is quite a structured person. And, well, it's just quite genius like that so you know it's not only pastoral care I'm talking about by the mentors. […] They have received a better understanding of how to apply English, which is transferred to school which is transferred to […] and more understanding that is also transferred into more assertive behaviour, rather than manipulative or bullying. So you know you can just think by you know increasing his vocab. (Whānau)*

Over time as the mentor and young person become more comfortable together, they experienced a sense of ease in each other's company: '*he became a mate',* feeling safe and able '*to talk about stuff'* or just sit comfortably in silence. Both the mentor and young person commented on the enjoyment they got from this comfortable relationship.

*It was like catching up with a mate that was cool coming back to that […] like I'm actually quite enjoying this, this is fun the relationship is great, and I laugh. (Ryan, mentor)*

From this connection and place of comfort a sense of trust had developed. At this point the mentors reported how receptive their young person was to confide in them, seek their support or advice.

> *She would say comments like […] we're the perfect match or just the fun we have and she mentioned that she trusts me and she tells me things that she doesn't tell mum because mum will get angry - not in a naughty way but like she said that I give good advice which was nice that was positive [...] I guess she has found someone she can confide in (Claire, mentor)*

At the one year mark, after entering the new world of mentoring without a framework, the mentors had the opportunity to reflect on their journey. Most commented that the commitment they had made to the organisation at the start had now become something much deeper. Although this journey had been challenging at times and involved sacrifices, many reflected on the sense of achievement of overcoming those challenges to reach this milestone. They recognised the important contribution they made by just being there.

> *So like, you know, there was that camp was the weekend of my good mate's engagement [...] but I was like, Oh, I said, like, I'm gonna go to camp. And like if I if I ditch on [my young person] now, and that's just like another person who's like, like let [him] down so I feel like responsible. You know what I mean? I feel like the reason why I did this in the first place was like just because if I take this out of my life like, I can't as easily say like, I'm being really good for the world (Andrew, mentor)*

And it didn't seem to matter that much if their initial intention for expanding horizons had been achieved. Rather the relationship that had developed in the interim was regarded as the main achievement:

> *The flying fox was something, man he is he just did not do that day at all. But he managed to get, massive, managed to convince him to go up the ladder. Yeah, we landed yet. But and then the similar thing on the rock-climbing wall, but also stuff like say you take him out to dinner at an Asian restaurant and he doesn't he doesn't want to eat anything. Or he doesn't want to try new foods very easily, you really have to like go like –'this is some new like, this is pesto, try it' He's like 'oh I don't know'. He'll have like miniscule (laughter). But it's not necessarily like a problem. I feel like it's just a work in progress I'm trying to help him with. (Andrew, mentor)*

The notion that young people's lives were a 'work in progress' was central to the mentor's ideas about what they were able to offer. Although initially, change was important to note in order to stay motivated and engaged, this became less important over the first year of the relationship. Hope for the future lives of the young people was integral to their sense of contribution and allowed them to recognise that even small gains may have greater payoff in the longer term. Another element that helped the mentors stay invested in the process, was the growing realisation that they were seeing real value out of the mentoring process in their own lives. This idea will be taken up in the next theme.

## Mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial

This theme explores how mentoring can be mutually beneficial for both mentors and young people. Although the positioning of 'mentor' suggests that mentors provide rather than receive the benefits of mentoring, mentors reported that they benefit in myriad but subtle ways that often go unnoticed by the younger person. They described mentoring as an act of service to others that inherently made them feel good, seeing it as a privilege to be in a position to give back to the community and make a difference in young people's lives. This gave mentors a greater sense of meaning and purpose. While mentors felt privileged to be part of the young person's personal growth, the challenges of mentoring offered new opportunities to learn and grow personally and spiritually themselves. The relationship brought out parts of the mentor that they didn't know about or had forgotten were there. For example, they talked about how the young person gave them a renewed capacity for joy, or an ability to slow down, play, explore, and appreciate little things in life that they had taken for granted. Whānau would speak of the important impacts on family life beyond the life of the young person. Mentors would also tell stories on positive interactions and the growth in relationship between themselves and parents and caregivers. Mentors also spoke of the positive impacts on their own parenting, or on their families, due to the young person being a part of their lives.

The mentors were invited to reflect on their initial motivation for taking part in the programme. Many viewed volunteering as a sense of duty, mentoring a young person was as an opportunity to be of service to the community, to give back, to add to someone's life and help someone more 'at risk' and how these acts inherently made them feel good. Although some mentors recognised this as an opportunity for self-growth.

> *I want to be someone that listens, who makes time for people. And if I can't be do that, if I can't be that for people on my own account then force yourself into a commitment that forces you to grow in those areas. It's a roundabout way of trying to, it's a spiritual and growth development way for me to be who I want to be. (Philip, mentor)*

However, many of the mentors were unprepared for the impact being with their young person would have on their lives.

> *I've made a little mate. And hopefully we'll be in each other's lives for a long time you know. I've benefitted [...] I reflect on our times together and what she says and I'm constantly learning from her and I don't know, I've learned a lot from her, and I can't kind of pin-point a particular instance. But yeah, a lot of enjoyment and I feel like I'm really giving when we hang out and I know when she listens to something I've said or taken on my advice when we hangout. And I feel like I've benefited in a lot of ways. (Claire, mentor)*

Being with their young person offered the mentor opportunities to participate in activities or refocus and take a break from their busy lives they may not have normally allowed themselves. It also allowed distraction from the things that were bothering them, for

instance Ruby commented:

> *There's also been times where going out is the last thing that I want to be doing but I've made myself do it because going out with her has actually made me forget about my own stuff that's happening and it's actually made me have a break both mentally but it's actually got me out even if it's only been walking or going to the park it's been it's got me out of that rut as such so. Yeah, it's been good so there's been stuff that I've got out of the match it's not just a one way thing it's been a two way thing and she's been she's not even aware of what I get out of it. (Ruby, mentor)*

The mentors appreciated the ways the experience had impacted on their outlook and affected their ways of being, sometimes helping them to rediscover joy in the things around them.

> *You know on a weekday in the summer why would I not do that? It was her idea, and I'm like oh my gosh why do I not do stuff like that all the time? Why don't I just make the most of life and do everything that you can get involved with in Auckland it's a big playground and without too much energy can go and explore and enjoy every day. I suppose having the capacity to find joy in the little things it's such an amazing trait which children have that you constantly sort of forget about as an adult (Anita, mentor)*

Others talked about how they reviewed the way they looked at the world and dealt with problems they encountered. Reportedly gaining a deeper understanding and empathy for people they worked with. For some mentors the impact of participating in the programme was difficult to verbalise.

> *It's just It's incremental, there's no there's no watershed moments necessarily. It's just incrementally over the last year. You ask: 'have you grown in the last year?' Well, yeah. How? I don't know. I just have. My brain feels clearer. I feel like I'm I get things a little bit more than I did a year ago. There's any number of reasons for that. But this is, you know, just that I look forward to Tuesdays at 3:30. (Neil, mentor)*

The mentors often recognised that they were also helping the whānau by giving them some time out: '*it's good to sort of take him away from his home for an afternoon, give his gran some time' (Robert, mentor).* The mentors were also able to support the whānau in other ways by supporting or supplementing their parenting roles.

> *It's hard, I've got other kids and when you're getting a bit older […] He plays games with him – I used to, but I can't now because I can't run (Whānau)*

Whānau agreed the mentor impacted their own lives as well. The whānau appreciated the support with behavioural issues they were experiencing with their young person and in negotiating systems they were less familiar with. Often the relationship developed into one

that was whānau to whānau. '*I just didn't expect her to bond with […]us too.' (Whānau).* The young person was frequently included in the mentor's family but also the mentor and their family were invited into in the young persons' whānau. Both the mentor and whānau commented on this connection and the valued relationship with their whānau.

> *As she came with her husband and [daughter] and then my dad took her to the front, […] she's done so much for our family so she deserves to sit at the front. And she basically she showed up. Not many people would have done that especially for the fact that she didn't know my mom. She still came to support my little sister. So yeah, we're super grateful for she's like, one of a kind. (Whānau)*

> *[the mentor] and her family, it's been, yeah, it's been a blessing in disguise, and I think we can all learn things from them, yeah, they're a solid unit. […] I felt just blessed just to be invited into their unit. (whānau)*

The mentors also recognised the experience enriched their family life:

> *The highlights for our family and myself would be how I guess it's been a real ease of having her come into our family because that's what we've done every week she comes into our house and we just hang out […] she brings such a high energy bubbly presence with her […] I feel like this has enriched our life by adding another friend into our family, another opportunity to think outside of ourselves […]It feels like an extension of our life. (Monique, mentor)*

The mentors reported how the experience of mentoring and interacting with their young and the assistance they received from their supervision session and Upside training events enhanced their interpersonal and parenting skills.

> *For me it's actually helped with stuff at home, you know, a lot about the teenage mind […], can help it at home and then some of the things also for work and things that work for home and they are and everything is, similar just to dealing with people with this. You know, the world family, stranger, whatever […] And this is learning about having different sorts of conversations or not so much at all, actually learning a little bit of different parenting skills, which is quite cool because like, my wife came with kids. I didn't have none. I don't know what to do. So this is kind of helping me build my parenting skills as well (Neil, mentor).*

Beyond the overall pleasant experience and transferable skills, the mentors expressed gratitude for the opportunity to enrich their own lives as well as that of their young person.

> *And to be there is a skill just to be there, is just something you have to grow just do that. It's kind of like love. Learning to love. Is it about the outcome or actually taking the steps to do that. (Philip, mentor)*

The value gained from engaging in the mentoring relationship was often described in these kinds of terms. Greater capacity to be a better person all round, or to somehow be

enhanced through the process of giving of oneself, seemed to be couched in somewhat spiritual terms. In other words, being a mentor made them a better person, and wasn't simply about making the young person better. However, this increased capacity also meant that they were able to be a better mentor, which would have direct benefit on the young person. Finding ways to identify and retain mentors that have seen this sort of growth would be a valuable strategy for Upside.

## Conclusions

In this report we have explored the ways that mentors, young people, and the young people's whānau have made sense of the impacts of the Upside youth mentoring programme. Although the programme is ostensibly set up to provide support for the young people, the data analysed for this report suggest that the programme is much more wide ranging than this. The particularity of the mentoring relationship makes it both complex to navigate and understand, but also the very thing that creates change in the young person, and also in their whānau. Further, the mentor themselves described the positive changes in their own lives. In other words, mentoring is a social good that enhances community and adds layers of social resource that people can draw from seeing improvement in the quality of their lives. One key feature of the data was the importance of the mentoring coordinator – this thread operated across almost all of the themes described above, and highlights the important value these team members add in the success of Upside's programme.

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