

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE OF
RESILIENCY-PROMOTING FACTORS IN
PREVENTING ADVERSE LIFE OUTCOMES
DURING ADOLESCENCE**

**A REPORT
TO
THE CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

BY

SUE HOWARD AND BRUCE JOHNSON



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Summary	vii
Executive Summary	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Research Methods and Procedures	8
Chapter 3: Data Analysis <i>What are the most important things that have happened to you in your life?</i>	14
Chapter 4: Data Analysis <i>Who are the most important people in your life?</i>	25
Chapter 5: Data Analysis <i>How do you like to spend your time?</i>	29
Chapter 6: Data Analysis <i>What do you like about your life?</i>	34
Chapter 7: Data Analysis <i>Are there things that have happened in your life that you wish hadn't happened?</i>	40
Chapter 8: Data Analysis <i>What are you proud of in your life?</i>	45
Chapter 9: Data Analysis <i>Have you some plans for the future? What do you think may help or hinder you in achieving those plans?</i>	51
Chapter 10: Data Analysis <i>What advice would you give other kids about life?</i>	63
Chapter 11: Discussion	66
Bibliography	76
Appendices	81

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of Protective Factors	5
Table 2: Participants' Sex, Age and Resilience/Non-Resilience Status by School	11
Table 3: Male and Female Resilient and Non-Resilient Participants by School	11

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SUMMARY

This study has explored some aspects of the lives of 71 young people judged to be 'at risk'. Thirty-eight of these young people were identified as demonstrating 'resilient' behaviour and 33 were identified as displaying 'non-resilient' behaviour. Important differences were discovered between the two groups in terms of the way they talked about events and people in their lives, what they valued, what they regretted and how they saw the future.

This study recommends a 'youth development' approach when working with young people. Evaluations of overseas intervention programs have shown that a resilience-orientation rather than a problem-prevention orientation is much more likely to be effective in reducing the whole range of risky behaviours, including delinquency and anti-social behaviour.

This study suggests that major strategies in any resilience-oriented intervention programs for young people need to address:

- the development of personal agency and autonomy
- the development of achievement, mastery and competence
- the development of connectedness and nurturance
- the development of a positive future orientation

These strategies should be implemented in three major settings: the home/family, the school and the local community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This study recommends that intervention programmes developed for use with young people identified as being 'at risk' should have a youth development focus rather than a problem-prevention focus.
2. Evaluations of successful intervention programmes based in the USA indicate that a positive youth development approach to intervention involves a number of key general principles:
 - The recognition of young people as resources to be developed rather than problems to be fixed
 - The active involvement of young people
 - The development of life-skills rather than problem-prevention skills
3. In practical terms, successful youth development programmes:
 - have strong theoretical frameworks
 - have adults who care and are willing to spend time with young people
 - provide opportunities for young people to make a contribution to others
 - teach skills and competencies
 - develop a sense of connectedness to others
 - use long-term rather than short-term strategies
 - respect the strength of communities (i.e. focus on potential human resources not on weaknesses)
4. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, successful interventions can occur in *microsystem* level settings like the following: home/family; school; local community.
5. HOME/FAMILY INTERVENTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE DATA
 - ***Development of autonomy and personal agency***
 - Family members need to be able to recognise and challenge self-defeating talk and learned helplessness in young people.
 - Family chores and tasks, that are within the young person's competence, should be required and genuine praise for effort and success (however small) should be the consequence.
 - Adults and older siblings can consciously model problem-solving behaviour. That is, they can think out loud when faced with problems showing, for example, how alternative solutions

can be generated; how the pros and cons of each possible solution can be weighed up; how different outcomes will demand different courses of personal action.

- In the safe environment of the family, young people should be encouraged to take risks that will develop personal competencies, skills and a sense of independence.

- *Development of nurturance*

- Both boys and girls should be shown how to care for younger siblings in a practical way (feeding, bathing etc) and given the opportunity to demonstrate responsibility in increasingly significant ways (e.g. walking younger siblings to school; baby-sitting).
- Boys and girls will benefit from the care and responsibility involved in having a pet.
- Having chores and tasks that are performed for the good of all family members (e.g. doing the dishes, preparing school lunches) helps develop a sense of nurturance.
- Celebrating special family occasions (e.g. birthdays) are important ways of teaching young people how to think of and care for others.

- *Development of connectedness*

- Family members should spend time with the young person, take an interest in their activities and be proud of their achievements.
- Family members should demonstrate that they care about the young person by, for example, setting reasonable rules and demanding certain standards of behaviour.
- Family members should be receptive when young people wish to talk about problems.
- Family members should encourage and support young people in their activities at school and outside the home.
- More and better-targeted intervention programmes to assist troubled families should be made available.

6. SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE DATA

- *Development of achievement, mastery and competence*

- Schools need to re-focus on the goals of teaching for achievement, mastery and competence for all students.
- The range of ways in which students can demonstrate achievement beyond the traditional academic and sporting ones needs to be expanded. Achievements in art, drama,

music, vocational education, work experience, leadership, social skills and so on, all need to be publicly recognised and valued.

- Mastery of appropriate literacy skills is essential for most students' sense of self worth and for their ability to progress successfully through secondary school. Schools should not assume that students proceed to the secondary school with literacy skills at an appropriate level, nor should they assume that different subject teachers have the special skills necessary to teach remedial literacy. Special programmes to facilitate achievement in these areas are required.
 - Criterion-based assessment practices should be utilised more extensively in order to provide low-achievers with a genuine sense of progress and achievement.
 - Many 'at risk' students are not academically-oriented but rather are firmly focused on the world of work beyond school. Vocational education and work experience programmes that are rigorous and well-structured can provide students with a real sense of achievement and a future orientation.
 - Teachers need to have high expectations for all students and not allow the presenting behaviours of some 'at risk' students (e.g. low self esteem, victim orientation) to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.
 - All students need to learn the relationship between achievement and good study strategies. They should be taught explicitly how to study and the specific values of goal-setting, effort and practice in relation to mastery need to be emphasised.
 - Schools should support organized sporting and non-sporting clubs and associations on school premises and during school time as well as in out-of-school hours. Many of these organizations (e.g. army cadets, computer clubs) enable young people to develop skills and competencies that are beyond the range possible in most school subjects.
-
- *Development of connectedness*
 - Teachers are well placed to act as the significant, caring adult in a young person's life. Teachers need to be prepared to undertake this important role when necessary.
 - Schools should have access to extensive resources to serve the personal, social and counselling needs of difficult or troubled students. Many 'at risk' young people have complex needs that are beyond the expertise of ordinary teachers and

without specialised help they are unlikely to feel a sense of connectedness to the school. In addition, their troublesome behaviour may make it difficult for other students to experience a sense of connectedness to school and teachers.

- It is important for schools to realise how important young people's social needs are especially in Years 8 and 9. School-based clubs and associations that support organized sporting and non-sporting activities are important in this regard. Not only do they provide opportunities for connecting with competent caring adults, they also provide plenty of opportunities for learning and practising social skills. More 'resilient' than 'non-resilient' students report being involved in groups of this kind but few groups were associated with the students' schools.
- School-based clubs and associations that provide opportunity for leadership and service are good ways of encouraging nurturance, responsibility and connectedness to others.
- *Development of autonomy and personal agency*
 - Teachers have an important role to play in both challenging defeatist talk and learned helplessness in students and in modelling problem-solving behaviour. In their feedback to students, teachers must take care to attribute failure to such things as lack of effort or poor preparation (things within a student's control) rather than lack of ability (things beyond a student's control).
 - The role that schools can play in promoting achievement, mastery and competence is a vital one in the development of self efficacy. When young people have had the experience of successfully mastering particular skills and when they believe that they are competent, they also have sufficient confidence to 'have a go' at other things; to have sufficient ego strength to risk failure in new ventures. Experiences of success give young people the confidence to take control of their lives.
 - Many students need to learn that learning is something under their own, not the teacher's control. Teachers in all subjects need to teach explicitly the importance of goal-setting, effort and practice in mastering skills and material.
 - Care needs to be taken to ensure that the transition from primary school to high school is smooth and is conceptualised as an achievable and exciting challenge rather than a formidable hurdle.
 - The resilient students in this study had powers of self-reflection, the ability to hypothesise and plan, considering a

range of different possibilities. These are higher-order thinking skills that can be developed through any school subjects be they traditional academic ones or vocationally-oriented ones.

- Young people need to be taught how to take control of conflict situations in socially acceptable ways. Behaviour management policies should reinforce the conflict resolution skills that are explicitly taught.

- *Development of future orientation*

- Vocational and career advice provided by schools needs to be comprehensive, up-to-date and it should provide a range of challenging (but achievable) options for all students. Careers advisers, like classroom teachers, need to ensure that the presenting behaviours of 'non-resilient' students do not influence their judgements about appropriate career choices (i.e. creating self-fulfilling prophecies).
- The narrow work-oriented view that many 'non-resilient' students have towards their education means that schools need to 'sell' subjects that students do not see as obviously relevant to future work. Subjects like Drama, Society and Environment, Science have intrinsic value for all students but may need to be 'sold' in different kinds of ways if they are to engage all students effectively.

7. COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE DATA

- Communities that are serious about youth development will develop a collaborative approach with local schools, families and young people in order to provide the kinds of support that will be valued and used.
- In general, local communities need to support (either alone or in partnership with businesses, schools, social or local government agencies) a range of organized sporting and non-sporting clubs and associations for young people. The types of clubs provided will depend on such local factors as, for example, the expertise of local people willing to help run them; the preferences of the young people and the willingness of community groups to provide equipment, space etc. In general though, these organizations will:
 - put young people in contact with caring adults
 - teach useful skills and competencies
 - provide opportunities for socialising
 - encourage young people to use their skills for the benefit of others

- allow young people to develop leadership skills.
- Given the popularity of bike-riding among young males in this study, local Councils could look for ways to provide suitable areas (preferably with rugged terrain) for bike-riders to practise their skills.
- Given the popularity of 'talking with friends' as a pastime among young females in this study, local Councils or shopping centres could look for ways of providing safe and comfortable public spaces for young people to meet, talk, play music and so on.
- Community service organizations (e.g. St. Johns, the CFS, the SES) and activist groups (Amnesty, Greenpeace, Landcare, WWF) should be encouraged to develop and actively recruit young people into youth chapters or cadet groups.
- Being involved with organized sport was a major feature of the 'resilient' participants' lives. Chatham, the small country town, had a high success rate here because as one student explained, you don't have to be a star to be involved in country sport – everyone gets a guernsey. City communities need to give some thought to ways in which they can likewise involve everyone who wants to play (not just the star players) in organized sporting activities.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

It has been well documented both in Australia (Eyers, Cormack and Barratt 1992; Cumming 1998) and overseas (Galton, Rudduck and Gray 1999; Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan 1996) that the transitional life stage of adolescence can be a difficult time for significant numbers of young people. From a developmental perspective, this period represents the time between the life phases of childhood and adulthood in which new developmental challenges are experienced by young people and new demands are being made of them by others (see Erikson 1972; Hargreaves and Earl 1999). These developmental challenges include:

- adjusting to physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes
- developing increased independence
- accepting greater responsibility for personal decision making
- developing a new sense of personal identity
- developing new feelings of self worth
- establishing a sexual identity
- gaining social acceptance and support among peers of the same and opposite sex
- thinking more abstractly and reflectively
- becoming more aware of the social and political worlds
- establishing and maintaining relationships with particular adults who can provide advice and act as role models

(adapted from Hargreaves and Earl 1990)

Because these are often very challenging tasks, many adolescents experience difficulties achieving them. As Earl writes:

This is a tough and challenging time as young people try out a whole range of personae, push the envelope on limits set by others (most notably parents and teachers), and struggle to evaluate the social implications of their personalities, the peer group they choose and the values and standards they hold for themselves. (Earl 1999: 4)

The outcomes of their struggles are often not positive. The international literature is replete with studies documenting high rates of juvenile delinquency (National Crime Prevention 1999), 'epidemic levels' of teenage pregnancy and teenage childbearing (Kirby 1999), drug and alcohol abuse (Dusenbury and Falco 1997), and teenage violence (Dusenbury, Falco, Lake, Brannigan and Bosworth 1997). The media also 'pay a great deal of attention' to these issues and problems (National Crime Prevention 1999: 2), ensuring that they remain high on the public's and politicians' agendas for remedial intervention.

What interventions should be supported remains an issue of contention. At one extreme, some governments have legislated for extensive and punitive judicial responses to juvenile crime (e.g. 'mandatory sentencing' in the Northern Territory and W.A.), while others have argued for preventative programs aimed at strengthening pro-social elements within communities, and reducing the impact of risk factors on vulnerable youth (National Crime Prevention 1999).

Constructing adolescence as a time of turmoil and trouble serves to stigmatise and promote negative perceptions of adolescents and their families. The negative portrayal of young people as 'bullies', 'truants', 'drug takers', 'liars', 'spoilt brats', and 'aimless wanderers', is quite common and leads to unhelpful and counter-productive suggestions about how to 'solve the problems of youth' (Cormack 1996: 5).

A more constructive analysis of the developmental demands of adolescence draws on the newly emerging literature on human resilience – defined by Masten, Best and Garmezy as 'the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances' (quoted in Howard and Johnson 1999: 14). Rather than adopting a deficit perspective on youth issues, resilience-focussed research seeks to identify the positive factors in adolescents' lives that help them cope with the new developmental tasks required of them by society (Howard, Dryden and Johnson 1999).

From this perspective, 'problems' with adolescents are not so much located within 'boisterous, impulsive, carefree, moody teenagers' (Earl, 1999: 4), but within the social structures in which they live, work and play. This perspective is congruent with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) which views the individual as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. From this broader perspective, the environment is seen as a series of nested structures or systems:

- the microsystem: consisting of settings in the adolescent's immediate environment where they are physically present (e.g. home, school and neighbourhood),
- the mesosystem: consisting of interactions and connections between microsystem settings,
- the exosystem: consisting of settings in the wider society where the young present is generally not physically present (e.g. parent's workplace, local government and community service agencies), and
- the macrosystem: consisting of the values, laws and customs of the local, national and international communities.

These nested structures are the source of 'assistance' in making the transitions of adolescence (National Crime Prevention 1999: 133-4). These forms of assistance are frequently called 'protective factors' or 'protective

mechanisms' in the literature. Identifying these forms of assistance, their operation in different social contexts and at different times and how they may prevent adverse life outcomes during adolescence were the aims of this study.

ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT OF RESILIENCE

The notion of invulnerability from harmful influences - resilience - emerged, almost by accident, from longitudinal developmental studies of 'at risk' groups of children as they encountered many life stressors during their development, through childhood and adolescence, to adulthood (Werner and Smith 1987; Silva and Stanton 1996). While these were essentially epidemiological studies of the incidence of disease and pathology in the studied populations, interest grew in what Rutter (1990: 181) describes as 'the ubiquitous phenomenon of individual difference in people's responses to stress and adversity'. As Benard (1991: 4) observes:

a consistent - and amazing - finding has emerged. Although a certain percentage of these high-risk children developed various problems (a percentage higher than the normal population) a greater percentage of the children became healthy, competent young adults.

Later studies focused on specific populations of resilient children and adolescents (Garmezy 1974; Anthony 1987; Werner and Smith 1988; Garmezy and Rutter 1983). In these studies the subjects were classified as being at risk of psychiatric disorders, delinquency and other negative life outcomes because of a variety of individual, family and environmental factors. According to Thornberry et al. (1995: 230) these factors include low parental education, parental unemployment, family receipt of welfare, family transience and family members experiencing trouble with drugs and the law. Yet rather than focusing on those children and adolescents who were casualties of these negative factors, the studies focused instead on those who had not succumbed. The questions this work investigated were:

- What is it about these children and adolescents that enables them to survive?
- What makes them apparently immune to the factors that negatively affect others?

Instead of focusing on individual deficit, the new approach focused on individual and community strengths and thus, the concept of resilience emerged in the psychological literature.

Protective factors or processes

In the literature, the identifying characteristics of resilient adolescents are such things as social competence, problem-solving skills, mastery, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future (see Waters and Sroufe 1983; Garmezy 1985; Rutter 1980, 1984, 1985; Werner and Smith 1988; Masten,

Best and Garmezy 1990; Gore and Eckenrode 1994; Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence 1994).

Protective factors have been described in relation to three primary systems in the adolescent's world - family, school and community. In relation to the family, many of the protective factors identified by research clearly relate to the consistency and quality of care and support the individual experiences during infancy, childhood and adolescence.

The work of Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston (1979) in Britain shows that another source of protective factors can be the school. Children in discordant and disadvantaged homes are more likely to demonstrate resilient characteristics if they attend schools that have good academic records and attentive, caring teachers. Studies conducted in the U.S. have also shown the important role that individual teachers can play in resilient children's lives (Geary 1988; Werner and Smith 1988; Coburn and Nelson 1989).

In relation to the community, children in disadvantaged areas are generally considered more at risk than those in more affluent areas. However, certain community characteristics seem to operate as protective factors. The strength of social support networks provided by kin and social service agencies, for example, is one such factor (Pence 1988).

These clusters of protective factors were confirmed and extended by qualitative research into child and adolescent resilience in South Australia (see Howard and Johnson 1999, 2000; Dryden, Johnson and Howard 1998). Table I (page 5) summarises the findings of this research. Briefly, this research suggests that child and adolescent resilience is influenced by:

- *Life Events*

Rutter (1987, 1990) describes four types of protective factors or processes: those that reduce risk impact or reduce a person's exposure to risk; those that reduce negative chain-reactions that follow bad events or experiences; those that promote self esteem and self efficacy through achievements and, finally, positive relationships and new opportunities that provide needed resources or new directions in life. The first and last of these are captured within the *life events* category in Table I.

Repeatedly, in our study of the lives of children displaying resilient or non-resilient behaviours, critical life events served to either ameliorate or intensify individuals' exposure to risks to their well-being. Serious injury or the death of a close relative increased individuals' exposure to risk; an absence of such trauma proved to be protective.

Opportunities to join and belong to supportive groups contributed to individuals' resilience, while high mobility due to changes in parental employment contributed to individuals' disconnectedness and their vulnerability. These *life events* were largely beyond the capacity of individuals to control, and serve to reinforce Garmezy's caution about

Table I: Summary of Protective Factors

LIFE EVENTS	SELF	FAMILY	SCHOOL	COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full term birth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Satisfactory birth weight - Injury free birth - Able bodied • Continued good health • Opportunities at major life transitions • Meeting significant persons • Moving into a more supportive community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy temperament - Academic ability - Emotional strength - Sense of autonomy - Sense of humour - Social competence - Physical competence • Coping behaviours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem solving strategies - Active engagement - Optimism - Persistence - Reflectivity • Beliefs about self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High self esteem - Positive self efficacy - Sense of purpose - Positive attitude - Self confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love & attachment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents - Siblings - Extended Family • Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Material - Emotional • Parenting practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistency - Positive expectations • Models of resiliency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents - Siblings - Extended family • Positive links with school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive relationships - Knowledge of children & adolescents - Positive behaviour management skills - Positive sense of efficacy - High expectations • Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time - Other adults - Agencies • School climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child-focused - Collaborative - Caring - Safe/Secure - Empowering • Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant - Enriched - Age appropriate • Special programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social ('Life Skills') - Academic (LAP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive - Protective - Culturally proud • Prosocial Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive - Common interests - Common experiences - Sharing - Helpful - Talk with & listen • Sports and clubs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive self-identity - Belongingness & connectedness - Opportunities for success • Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive - Protective

using the notion of resilience to blame individuals who, for a variety of complex reasons, do not achieve positive life outcomes (Garmezy 1994: 13). Acknowledging the influence of these sometimes indiscriminate and haphazard *life events*, challenges socially naive and simplistic explanations of success and failure based on the liberal-humanist view which individualises social issues and leads away from broader social and cultural considerations (Cormack 1998).

- *Personal Factors*

While serendipitous life events can either protect or threaten adolescents' well-being, a significant cluster of protective factors focuses on the personal attributes and skills of individuals. The combination of positive dispositional characteristics, personal coping strategies and beliefs about personal efficacy and agency contribute to individual resilience.

- *Family Factors*

Consistent parenting practices that promote attachment and emotional bonding promote resilience. So too, do siblings and members of the extended family who provide emotional and material support and who model social problem-solving. These relational requisites can be provided in many types of families, not just in conventional nuclear families (husband, wife and children).

- *School Factors*

Schools that are safe, positive and achievement-oriented help adolescents develop a sense of purpose and autonomy and promote connectedness. They can also teach valuable life skills such as social problem-solving as well as social competence. Perhaps most importantly, schools can ensure that every student develops the foundation academic competencies needed for further learning and the development of positive self esteem. In these ways schools can 'teach for resilience' by promoting academic competence and attending to the social and emotional needs of students.

- *Community Factors*

Individuals and groups within the community can provide opportunities for adolescent involvement and participation in social, sporting and cultural activities. These activities promote feelings of belonging and connectedness that are central to the development of resilience.

Implications for the prevention of negative life outcomes

The increasingly impressive body of research into adolescent resilience is steering researchers, policy makers and program developers away from preventative interventions that focus on narrowly defined deficits like teenage drug taking and delinquency, towards more holistic, relationship-building and life-skills development strategies. For example, Kirby (1999: 93) reports that some 'youth development programs that address non-sexual risk factors can reduce actual rates of pregnancy and childbearing', suggesting that these programs go part of the way towards addressing the

highly complex human needs that sometimes compel young adolescents into early sexual relationships. While Kirby does not advocate the abandonment of education programs that have highly specified characteristics, he suggests that learning more about how youth development programs work 'represents one of many challenges for the next 20 years of research' (p. 93).

The implications of resilience research for the prevention of negative life outcomes are clear. We need to know more about how protective factors and processes work in the lives of adolescents, in real and complex social settings over time, so that social and educational interventions can be developed to strengthen them. While our qualitative, longitudinal study of 55 primary school children's lives (Howard and Johnson 1999) has provided us with valuable insights into the operation of these protective processes, more needs to be known about how young adolescents negotiate one of life's crucial periods of transition. This need represents the guiding rationale for the study described in this report. By identifying the range and operation of significant protective factors and processes in the lives of at-risk adolescents, we are able to provide the knowledge base for new preventative interventions that specifically aim to strengthen these factors and 'create a more supportive, friendly and inclusive environment for children, young people and families that promotes healthy, prosocial development' (National Crime Prevention 1999: 27).

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODS and PROCEDURES

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The extensive overseas literature and our own previous work (reviewed in Chapter 1) has clearly identified the kinds of protective factors and processes that can support young people whose lives are difficult and/or troubled. By recognising and drawing on these factors and processes, 'at risk' young people are able to make positive and constructive life choices and decisions, thus demonstrating, what the literature calls, resilient behaviour. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979) has pointed to the major life settings in which young people may find that immediate support - home, peer group, school and community.

Our aims in this study were:

- to identify the precise nature of protective factors and processes at work in, or absent from, our respondents' lives;
- to gain a clear picture of how each of Bronfenbrenner's settings - home, school and community - affords particular kinds of protective processes and factors;
- to compare the life strategies typically employed by young people who had been identified as demonstrating resilient and non-resilient behaviours;
- to identify whether cohort variables, such as age, sex, location or ethnicity influence resilient/non-resilient young people's strategies;
- to provide some rich descriptive accounts to give insights into the actual lived experience of young people demonstrating resilient and non-resilient behaviour.

Research methods designed to provide the "big picture" (questionnaire, survey etc) with hundreds of respondents and findings expressed in statistical frequencies, percentages, variances and so on, were not what we were seeking for this study. Rather, we wished to provide a richly textured and detailed "small picture" of the lives of some young people identified as being 'at risk' and either demonstrating resilient or non-resilient behaviour.

Our general aim then, was to understand the subjective worlds of our participants; our specific aim was to discover what protective factors and processes look like and how they work in the real lives of real young people. For these reasons, a qualitative research design was chosen. As Leininger (1985: 5) says:

... qualitative research focuses on identifying, documenting, and knowing (by interpretation) the world views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts and general characteristics of life events, situations, ceremonies and specific phenomena under investigation, with the goal

being to document and interpret as fully as possible, the totality of whatever is being studied in particular contexts from the people's viewpoint or frame of reference.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Schools

Working within South Australia, participants were sought from two rural state high schools, three metropolitan state high schools and one metropolitan Catholic college. The names of all schools have been changed.

- **Chatham High School:** Chatham (pop: 4,200) is a small agricultural centre in the State's mid-north. Significant wealth is generated by the area's principle crop but the town itself does not give the impression of being "well-heeled" and there are deep pockets of rural poverty in the surrounding areas. There appears to be plenty of employment available in Chatham, although much of this is unskilled, labouring work and much of it casual or seasonal in nature. Chatham High School's population of 495 students is drawn from both the town and the wider surrounding countryside.
- **Point Albert High School:** Point Albert (pop: 13,995) is further north than Chatham and is a town struggling with the demise of the industries that once made it economically viable. There is considerable economic disadvantage here, poor employment prospects and as a consequence many social problems. Point Albert's physical location, close to traditional Aboriginal lands, has provided the town with a significant Aboriginal population. Point Albert High School's population of 680 students is drawn largely from the town itself.
- **Penrose High School** is an R - 12 state school located in the disadvantaged northern suburbs of Adelaide. It is one of several schools serving the area and it has a school population of 1200 students.
- **Templeton High School** is located in the north western suburbs of Adelaide and it too serves an economically depressed community although there are pockets of re-gentrification associated with marina developments along the coast here. It is a state school with a population of 460.
- **Murray Glen High School** is located in the economically disadvantaged southern suburbs of metropolitan Adelaide. It is one of four state high schools serving the area and it has a school population of 680.
- **Glenross College** is a Catholic high school located on a multi-campus site in the northern suburbs. The community that it serves is an 'estate development' established some 15 years ago. Working class and migrant families were originally attracted to this area when skilled trades employment was available locally. Modern housing stock and amenities give the area a "well off" appearance, however unemployment and attendant social problems have become

significant in recent years. The population of the College is 655. The school charges fees in the region of \$2000 per year but many student places are subsidised by the Catholic system.

The Participants

Each school was asked to identify students 'at risk' who were exhibiting either 'resilient' or 'non-resilient' behaviour at the time. To assist them in this task they were provided with a screening device that we had used in our previous work and had modified for use with secondary school students (see Appendix A). We asked that students in Years 8 and 9 be considered and that the selection process be undertaken by a team including the Deputy Principal, the School Counsellor and the class Home Group teacher. Once students had been identified they were given information sheets and consent forms to be signed by parents/guardians.

In Point Albert we had hoped to involve a number of Aboriginal students in the project, however this proved to be impossible. The response rate to consent forms for Aboriginal students in the first instance was nil. We followed up these students through the Deputy Principal but we were still unsuccessful. Finally, we employed an Aboriginal Education Worker associated with the school to visit the families of potential participants to explain the nature of the project and the importance of involving Aboriginal students. Despite this effort, we were still unsuccessful. It is very clear that Aboriginal families in this area are deeply suspicious of any research that seeks to involve them - and with good reason. As a group they feel over-researched and have had bad experiences in the past with research that has produced unflattering and insensitive reports about Aboriginal lives and circumstances.

Seventy one participants, comprising 35 girls and 36 boys, were selected to take part in the study. Of these, 38 were judged to be displaying resilient behaviour at the time and 33 non-resilient behaviour. Details about the participants' schools, ages, sex and resilient/non-resilient status are provided in Tables 2 and 3 (Page 11) .

The Methods

Individual interviews with participants were the principal data-gathering device. These interviews took anything up to 30 minutes and were to be conducted in a quiet place in the participant's school during school hours.

Table 2: Participants' Sex, Age and Resilience/Non-Resilience Status by School

School	Female	Male	13 yrs	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	Resilient	Non-resilient
Chatham H.S.	9	8	8	2	5	2	5	12
Point Albert H.S.	3	2	0	4	1	0	3	2
Templeton H.S.	13	6	2	10	7	0	12	7
Penrose H.S.	4	6	3	3	4	0	8	2
Murray Glen H.S.	6	7	3	6	2	2	7	6
Glenross College	0	7	1	1	5	0	3	4
Total	35	36	17	26	24	4	38	33

Table 3: Male and Female Resilient and Non-Resilient Participants by School

School	Female Resilient	Female Non-Resilient	Male Resilient	Male Non-Resilient
Chatham H.S.	4	5	1	7
Point Albert H.S.	1	2	2	0
Templeton H.S.	10	3	2	4
Penrose H.S.	3	1	5	1
Murray Glen H.S.	2	4	5	2
Glenross College	0	0	3	4
Total	20	15	18	18

Careful thought was given to the question of who were to be the interviewers. The principal researchers are extremely experienced research interviewers, however we judged that, due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions we wished to ask, young people were more likely to respond candidly to an interviewer closer to their own age. Accordingly, we chose five of our graduate students (aged between 19 and 21) and put them through a structured series of training sessions on the art of research interviewing.

An interview schedule that was similar to the one we had used with younger children was modified for use with teenage respondents. It was trialed with a small number of young people and was subsequently further modified. The basic interview schedule comprised the questions below. During training, the interviewers workshopped supplementary or supporting questions, prompt questions and rephrased questions to assist them in the interview process.

Interview Questions	Theoretical Construct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important things that have happened to you in your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of life events • Exposure to risk • Operation of protective processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the important people in your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love and connectivity • Sense of belonging • Family support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you like to spend your time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in activity • School and community resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like about your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self esteem • Autonomy • Self efficacy and agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there things that have happened in your life that you wish hadn't happened? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanatory style • Future orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are you proud of in your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self esteem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you some plans for the future? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What may help or hinder you in achieving those plans? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy • Self efficacy and agency • Operation of protective processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What advice would you give other kids about life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy • Self efficacy and agency

At the time of the interview, participants were also asked to complete an inventory of 18 questions that related to how they coped with stress in various forms. Each question had 10 values expressed in percentages from 'Not at all' (10%) to 'All the time' (100%). These questions provided

additional information and also acted as a check on some interview data. For example, several students who spoke openly about drug and alcohol use in their interviews indicated a 'not at all' choice on the question 'I use drugs and/or alcohol to help me cope with stressful situations'. Immediately after the interview, the interviewer was asked to write a brief 'impression' of the person they had just interviewed, reporting on such things as the interviewee's appearance, manner, compliance, body language and so on. These reports proved helpful for those members of the research team who were not present at the interview.

With the consent of the participants, all interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The data management software program, NUD•IST (QSR 1995) was used to manage the very large quantity of data produced.

The Analysis

The analysis was carried out in several steps:

- The 71 interviews were entered into NUD•IST in their original form.
- Answers to main interview questions were identified and gathered together (coded) so, for example, every respondent's response to the question: Who are the important people in your life? was identified and gathered up into a 'question category'.
- Major themes in these question categories were identified and coded.
- Key ideas and words signalling the location of major themes occurring elsewhere in the transcripts were tracked down through exhaustive searches.
- The coded data were then interrogated using demographic information gathered about the participants. In this way, it was possible to identify patterns and trends in the different categories of participants.

In Chapters 3 - 10 the results of the analysis are presented.

CHAPTER 3 DATA ANALYSIS

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU IN YOUR LIFE?

Introduction

The first step in the analysis of the data was to identify all the respondents' answers to Key Questions and then to look for patterns in their responses. As all the young people were identified as being 'at risk', it was no surprise to find that running through all their talk were themes concerning loss, disruption, chaotic life events and violence. There were, however, interesting findings in relation to how participants, identified as 'resilient' and 'non-resilient', differed in their responses.

In examining the data for each Key Question, the aim is to show the role that *protective factors and processes* play in the lives of real 'resilient' young people and how the lack of these same factors and processes plays out in the lives of those who are 'non-resilient'. In addition, indications for prevention and intervention suggested by the data will be presented.

In recognition of the fact that resilience and non-resilience are determined to a very large extent by external influences and are not permanent individual characteristics, we use quote marks around the descriptions 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' when they refer to our participants. In this way we intend to convey that either state can change if external factors change.

We will use quotes from the transcripts liberally in order to illustrate analytical points. The names of all participants have been changed and their age at the time of the interview is indicated in brackets.

KEY QUESTION 1: *WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU IN YOUR LIFE?*

What the young people classified as 'the most important happenings' in their lives varied a good deal and fell into two broad groups - pleasant things (e.g. family holidays, winning a trophy, the birth of a baby brother) and unpleasant things (e.g. parental divorce, suspension from school, illness and death of loved ones). Only 6 participants (8%) were unable to think of anything in response to this question and they fell into both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient categories'.

Personal accomplishments

By far the most common theme offered here, mentioned by 32% of all participants (23), referred to personal accomplishments. Of these, nearly three quarters of the responses (17) were made by 'resilient' students whereas about a quarter (6) came from those identified as 'non-resilient'.

The important role that sport and skilled physical activity can play in the lives of resilient young people is demonstrated in the frequency of this theme in the responses of 'resilient' boys in particular. They talk about their involvement in sporting teams, especially successful ones, with great pride.

Rory (14 yrs): We came 4th in the State this year.
I: Is that good?
Rory: Yeah, there are about 40 teams in the State!
I: O.K. How does that make you feel?
Rory: Pretty good. Just being part of a good team.

Winning trophies and awards, either as individuals or as part of a team is also clearly a highly salient achievement:

Alan (13 yrs): I've won baseball's Best and Fairest. Baseball's my favourite sport.

For others, just engaging in skilled physical activity is of great personal importance. Beginning swimming training, learning new tricks on a BMX bike and playing a great variety of vigorous sports are all discussed with enthusiasm.

Fewer 'resilient' young people mentioned academic achievement as being the most important thing in their lives but for some (again, mainly boys), 'graduating from primary school' (15 year old boy), 'getting a Distinction in the Westpac mathematics exam' (13 yr old boy), 'getting this far in school' (15 year old boy) or 'being good in school' (15 year old boy) were all considered important accomplishments.

Respondents were equally likely to nominate artistic or personal achievements - this was mainly, but not exclusively, the province of 'resilient' girls. One 15 year old girl talks about her success in graduating from a Youth Competence course and her involvement in St. John's Ambulance Brigade. Ann (14 yrs) talks with immense enthusiasm about being chosen to take part in an Eisteddfod:

Ann (14 yrs): I enjoyed being in the Eisteddfod and I was like heaps excited about it because there was fifty-something Year 8 girls that tried out for it. This was last year we had to try out for it although it's this year that we had to do it. Yeah! Fifty Year 8 girls tried out and only six got chosen and I got chosen, so it was heaps cool!

Recognition of personal growth is described by two 'resilient' girls. One talks about becoming more responsible to the extent that she is now trusted to take care of her baby sister and look after the house when her parents go out. Fifteen year old Britt talks about the personal importance of her first camp:

Britt (15 yrs): Well, I think a special time for me was when I went on my first camp - I've only ever been on one.

- I: What made that a special time or an important thing in your life?
- Britt: I think I communicated better with people. I usually have a lot of trouble trying to talk to people.

Among the 6 'non-resilient' students citing personal accomplishments as 'important things that have happened in their lives', sport again featured for 4 participants (3 boys and 1 girl) and 'getting a good education' was cited by both a boy and a girl.

Achievement - whether in individuals or in teams - is a phenomenon much prized and encouraged in Australian society. Schools in particular are institutions dedicated to achievement in scholastic, artistic, athletic and social spheres. Students are left in no doubt that 'achievement' is what their life at school is all about and on what their futures will depend. Little wonder then that personal achievement features so strongly in the respondents' consciousness of 'the most important things in their lives'.

While the gendered nature of what respondents classified as achievement is interesting, the main point to focus on here is that most respondents were highlighting achievements that occurred outside school (sporting clubs, community organizations) or were only loosely associated with it (camp, Eisteddfod). Given that more 'resilient' than 'non-resilient' students recorded personal achievements here, the role of the school and the community in developing resilience is highlighted. There is a clear need for schools to provide more students with the experience of achievement and for the community to expand the achievement opportunities for young people.

Family problems

The next most common category of response to the question: *What's the most important thing that has happened in your life?* concerned family problems. Twenty one per cent of participants (15) described, often with great passion and detail, disturbing incidents that involved them and members of their families. These incidents included acrimonious divorce, custody battles and murder. There is indeed a high level of violence in many of the respondents' lives.

The spread of responses in this category across both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents was almost even (8 'non-resilient' and 7 'resilient'). As indicated above, this is not a surprising result, given that all the participants were originally classified as being 'at risk' and family disruption was one of the indicators of 'risk' provided to those identifying potential participants for the study. What is interesting is the way in which respondents talked about the incidents.

Among the 'resilient' students, there is a much greater sense of control, of personal agency, of being able to handle, 'get over' or 'cope with' the situation than there is among the 'non-resilient' students. Leah (16 yrs),

for example, is a 'resilient' student and she talked about her parents' bitter fights about the custody of herself and her siblings at the time of the breakdown of the marriage. She describes how she was 'hijacked' by her mother, while her father grabbed her two siblings and 'took off in a caravan with them'. She says that the most important thing that has happened to her is turning 16 because now she can assume responsibility for the little brother whom she hints is at risk:

- Leah (16 yrs): Well, now I'm old enough to find my brother and tell my Dad that I'm old enough to look after my brother now.
- I: I see, so you want to find your brother and get him away from your Dad. Is that what you mean?
- Leah: Yes and no. He can still see Dad, it's just that I rather he be with someone else.

Other 'resilient' respondents display similar signs of personal control and agency despite the sometimes tragic family circumstances that envelop them. Gail (14 yrs) says: '[The most important thing that's happened in my life] is the way I've coped with my parents' divorce'. She goes on to explain how she took independent action to try and sever relations with her abusive father and to prevent her father's step-son from hurting her:

- Gail (14 yrs): We've had a lot of trouble with my Dad's new family and at one point my Dad told me and my sister that he's got a new family and he doesn't want anything to do with me and my sister anymore. And then this year I sort of got sick of the way he was treating us and I just wrote him a letter and told him I didn't want anything to do with him ever again because of the way he treated me. And his stepson - which isn't like his son, it's his wife's son - he attacked me and tried to strangle me earlier this year and when I put him up on an assault charge my Dad told me it must have been my fault and I deserved it. That's what sort of made me write the letter.

Sean (12 yrs) begins by describing the two bad events that are the most important things that have happened in his life - the death of his grandfather and the breakdown of his parents' marriage. Although clearly unhappy about his family situation, he describes how he tried to affect the outcome:

- Sean (12 yrs): Well they'd be having a verbal fight and I'd get out of bed and listen at night and I'd just go out and tell them to be quiet and they'd stop it and go to bed. The next night the same thing.

Ellie (14 yrs) has an alcoholic, unstable mother in another state and a father who, being a merchant seaman, is often absent from home. Her parents separated before she was born and she has spent her life shuttling backwards and forwards between them and various other carers. After

years of dealing with her mother's unpredictable, violent, alcoholic rages, Ellie finally realised things weren't going to change:

Ellie (14 yrs): Yeah. After all of that thinking that my Mum's changed and that she's a better person I went back interstate and it was great for a while, I mean I had my birthday up there with my Mum. It was great at the time but I knew it was wrong. She bought me stuff that I smoked up there. She bought me smokes, she bought me alcohol, she bought me pretty much anything, but I guess in a way it was like to say 'I'm cool, stay with me, I'm better than your Dad'. It just got a bit out of control. She started drinking heavily at night after she got back from work and then all of a sudden she stopped going to work. [...] I said 'Are you going to change for me at least?' and she goes 'Nope I don't a give a rat's arse, piss off, I don't care anymore' and I just said 'Right, that's it'. I went to my aunty's from there. I lived at my aunty's for about three weeks and then my Dad rings up and I moved back here.

Despite the long history of loss, dislocation and disillusion, Ellie does not talk as though she is a victim involved in a situation beyond her control. Instead, she makes an honest appraisal of her situation demonstrating a very mature level of insight and understanding and she takes action - she leaves.

By contrast, three 'non-resilient' respondents cite as the most important things that ever happened to them, events which happened many years ago. In Fiona and Chloe's cases they are unlikely to actually have memories of these events. Fiona (15 yrs) cites the fact that her father died when she was 2. Chloe (14 yrs) has been fostered since she was a baby and she is upset by this:

I: So what important things have happened to you in your life so far?
Chloe (14 yrs): Got fostered.
I: When did that happen?
Chloe: When I was 19 months old.
I: How do you feel about that?
Chloe: Upset.
I: It upsets you? Why's that?
Chloe: I'd rather be with my real parents.

Both girls (but Chloe in particular), possibly recognize the construction of the 'ideal family' (having a father/having 'real' parents), see themselves as 'lacking' and thus ascribe to themselves the status of 'victim'.

David (13 yrs) describes an incident where he was 'kidnapped' by his mother when he was 5 years old:

David (13 yrs): I was still with Dad and I went to school and Dad told me, if Mum comes to get me I have to hide under the desk. And I hid under the desk but it had thin legs. I thought I was hiding but I got seen. The teacher said to stop it but Mum just pulled me out of the school and everything.

In these accounts there is little sense of personal agency - probably justifiably so, given the age at which these events occurred. However, to cite them now, at such a distance of time, as the most important things in their lives suggests that these young people (especially Chloe and Fiona) feel somewhat determined by, or choose to be defined by, these events.

Lack of personal agency or control over what happens to them is evident also in other 'non-resilient' students' accounts of the most important things that have occurred in their lives. Gina (14 yrs) for example, lists a catalogue of serious events over which she appears to have had no control:

Gina (14 yrs): Okay - I got kicked out of my old high school. I got bashed this year and I had to move to my Nanna's. My friend got killed and my Aunty got cancer again.

Raelene (14 yrs), for whom her parents' divorce (when she was 11) was the most important thing in her life, describes her response to her parents' fighting - she lashed out, cried a lot and kept her unhappiness to herself. In her account, Raelene communicates her very real sense of powerlessness - and of shame - she cannot effect any solution to the bad situation she finds herself in:

Raelene (14 yrs): [...] they were always arguing. Every weekend they'd argue.
I: So how did that make you feel?
Raelene: Cross and I just wanted to run out. I got that angry with them yelling at each other all the time so I pulled the phone off the wall. I don't know why I just ripped the phone out.
I: O.K. Apart from the phone thing, how else did you respond?
Raelene: Just cried a lot and my sister Maureen used to always hold me and my brother Jason and used to always like take us outside so we wouldn't see them arguing and it was terrible.
I: How much did you speak about it with Mum and Dad? Was that something that you did? Did you talk to anyone else?
Raelene: No, never spoke of it at all to anyone.

Despite having similarly traumatic and disruptive things happen to them, the 'non-resilient' students describe these events in ways that are subtly different from the descriptions offered by 'resilient' students. 'Resilient' students' talk displays a sense of autonomy, a sense that the events they

describe are not overwhelming, that they can be controlled and that personal action can perhaps change the situation. The 'non-resilient' students, on the other hand, seem over-powered by the events; these things have happened to them and there's little that can be done about it; there is a sense that they are victims of these circumstances.

Family disruption and breakdown are key indicators of 'risk' for children on almost any scale of risk measurement that one cares to use. At the same time, the social construction of the 'ideal family' is one that is generally nuclear, intact and nurturant. Divorce and separation, although common in our society, still carry a social stigma. Family breakdown then, is highly traumatic for children because parents are supposed to stay together and care for the children and because the events accompanying the breakdown (as evidenced in the transcripts), are often frightening, abusive or violent. Given this, the frequency with which the theme of 'family problems' occurs in the participants' responses to this Key Question is understandable.

Potentially useful ways of helping young people to deal with traumatic events, like family breakdown, can be found in the differences between the 'resilient' and the 'non-resilient' students' responses. The personal efficacy or agency and problem-solving skills that the 'resilient' respondents demonstrate are not biological givens - they have been learnt and thus they can be taught directly to all children. In this way young people can be encouraged to take control of their lives and to develop dispositions and orientations that will help them avoid feeling overwhelmed by life's inevitable reverses.

On a broader scale, with the right kinds of support, family breakdown need not be inevitable. Communities, for example, can provide pre-emptive, more extensive and better targeted support and counselling for troubled parents and children.

Happy family events

Seventeen per cent of students (12) cited happy family events and relationships as the most important things that had happened in their lives. The 'resilient' students were far more represented in this category (10) than the 'non-resilient' (2).

Eight 'resilient' respondents drew attention to family relationships in their responses, with 6 of them (5 of them girls) claiming that the birth of a baby brother or sister had been the most important event in their lives. Fifteen year old Gemma's response points to the possible reason for the popularity of this category - a baby brother or sister is someone to take care of - they provide an opportunity to demonstrate nurturance and to be responsible for others:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| I: | So, what's been the most important thing to happen to you in your life? |
| Gemma (15 yrs): | My little sister was born. |

I: And why was that important to you?
Gemma: Because I had someone to look after finally. I was the youngest for ages - I've got two brothers. And I was sort of helping out with her and helping feed her. It's great.

Family holidays and regaining her mother's trust 'after being a hoon' were cited by the two 'non-resilient' respondents respectively.

As was discussed in the section above, the social construction of the 'ideal family' is one which highlights nurturance of the younger by the older members of the family. Nurturance, however, is still largely seen as a feminine quality in this society and this probably accounts for the popularity of the 'baby brother/sister' response among girls in this study.

Given that the opportunity for nurturance is considered important by 'resilient' (and predominantly female) respondents, the potential benefit to be gained from widely encouraging nurturant behaviour in both girls and boys is clear.

Changing schools

Leaving one school and beginning at another can be a big event for young people and for many of this study's participants it's one that has occurred on many occasions. In addition, the transition from primary to high school can be either a daunting experience or an exciting challenge. Fourteen per cent of students (10) cited changing schools as the most important thing that had happened in their lives, with 8 of them in the 'resilient' category and 2 in the 'non-resilient'.

'Resilient' students all cited changing schools as a positive experience. For some, like Brian (13 yrs) it meant leaving behind an unsatisfactory school situation and a chance for a fresh start:

Brian (13 yrs): I thought the transition [from primary to high school] was good because I was in a primary school where I was teased a lot and everyone knew me and I came to a high school where not many of these kids went - in fact none of them except one who's in my Home Group.

Holly (16 yrs) found the move from a country primary school to a big high school a challenge which she felt she handled well:

Holly (16 yrs): Coming from primary school to high school was a big step.
I: Yeah? Were there any friends that went with you?
Holly: Yeah, but when I came here none of them were in my classes and also the school I went to, there was only about 30 kids and there's like 500 here and it's like - Whoa!! It was big!
I: Hard to get used to?

Holly: Yeah - it took me a couple of terms to get used to it
but I made it - yeah!

John (14 yrs) saw going to high school as an indication of increasing maturity:

John (14 yrs): Going into high school [was the most important
thing that has happened in my life] and actually
like being responsible and all that.

Of the 2 'non-resilient' respondents, one described moving schools as 'a bit scary' (12 year old girl) and the other (15 yr old girl) listed the four schools (with all their attributes and faults) that she had attended in the last 3 years.

The fact that these young people chose 'changing schools' as the most important event in their lives may be partly explained by the fact that the transition from primary to high school has been the subject of intense attention in South Australia in recent years. The **Report of the Junior Secondary Review** (Eyers, Cormack and Barratt 1992) identified this transition as a critical one because it could influence the success of secondary schooling. As a consequence, much effort has been put into making the transition a smooth one. Ironically, in the process, young people are inevitably alerted to the possibility that moving up to high school could be a hazardous journey!

The 'resilient' young people here have pride in the fact that they have successfully dealt with a challenge. From their responses, an argument could be made for a de-emphasis on the hazards of transition and a re-emphasis on the achievable (and supported) challenge that the move to high school presents. Successful transition should be seen as a personal achievement that indicates 'growing up' - increased maturity.

Interpersonal conflict

In relation to interpersonal conflict, 7% of all participants (5) - mentioned this theme. One boy was classified 'resilient' while among the 'non-resilient' participants there was one boy and three girls. The conflict was largely confined to recent events in school - fighting, harassment, abusive name-calling and being 'really rude to teachers'. One girl, however, seems to have become involved in a gang war outside school.

Gerry (12 yrs), the 'resilient' boy was upset by the harassment that he had suffered at the hands of peers. His response had been to 'talk back' and 'yell' at his tormentors which then made matters worse. However, he says he has 'learned from all of those mistakes'. He claims to have taken advice from teachers and now, instead of lashing back, he's 'going to control my temper and the verbal stuff'. Once again, here is evidence of 'resilient' students exerting personal autonomy, taking control and dealing with an unsatisfactory situation in a constructive way.

Some 'non-resilient' students take control of conflict situations, however their solutions are not constructive. The way they choose to deal with conflict will only serve to maintain or worsen an already unsatisfactory situation. Eric (13 yrs), for example, responded violently to harassment from another boy :

Eric (13 yrs): He picked up my bag and threw it and then made my locker door hit me, so I grabbed him, whacked him against the locker and then he tried to deck me but I decked him first and he fell. He pulled me down with him and I put my knee down and broke his wrist.

I: Why do you think it happened?

Eric: Oh, he'd picked on me ever since he came to school last year and I just had enough.

Like Eric, Nina (15 yrs) appears not to have considered alternative ways to deal with harassment:

Nina (15 yrs): Well I first had a friend here that goes to this school, her name's Alison, and well, she apparently called me something and I went round and flogged her.

Gina (14 yrs) has been severely beaten up by a gang, not, it seems, because of something she has done but because of her association with someone else:

Gina (14 yrs): My friend done something heaps bad and everyone wanted to bash her for it, but because I was her best friend and I was there, they just bashed me instead. They knocked my tooth out and broke my leg and broke my finger and I had my blood all over everything and I had this blood clot in my nose and I had to get it out and stuff. And it was all because of my best friend.

Gina's parents encouraged her to press charges against her assailants in order to recover the costs associated with her hospitalisation but this inflamed the situation. Threats were made against Gina and the family. The result is that, for her own protection, Gina has been sent to live with her grandmother in a distant suburb.

Gina is being made a victim here on several levels. She was certainly a victim of aggression in the original assault - especially as she was not the gang's real target. In addition, the way her parents have chosen to deal with the aftermath of the assault has exacerbated her victim status. She's the one who's on the run; she's the one who's had to be uprooted from home; she's the one who is frightened. In sending her away, Gina's parents are most likely trying to protect her, but in doing so they are signalling that 'running away' is the only way to avoid trouble.

Interpersonal conflict, because it frequently does involve physical or emotional damage, is likely to be highly memorable. This is probably why respondents judged the episodes reported here to be the 'most important things that had happened to them'.

There are three ways of dealing with this kind of conflict: the socially sanctioned way of peaceful negotiation and problem-solving (Gerry's way); running away (Gina's way) and 'flogging' your opponent (Eric and Nina's way). All the young people attended schools where there were behaviour management, conflict resolution and anti-bullying policies in place. The fact that Gerry is 'resilient' and Eric, Nina and Gina are all 'non-resilient' may suggest that a characteristic of resilient children is that they pick up on social rules and apply them more quickly than others - this may also be a class-based phenomenon. Skills such as these, however, can be - and probably need to be - explicitly taught to all students. In addition, opportunities for applying and reinforcing these skills need to be provided in families, schools and in the wider community.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- personal achievement
- personal autonomy, agency, self-efficacy
- problem-solving skills
- nurturance; taking responsibility for/care of others
- accepting challenge
- conflict-resolution skills

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- provision of more opportunities for achievement and mastery in school
- expanded opportunities for non-scholastic achievement in the community
- explicit teaching of personal efficacy; teach young people how to take control of their lives
- extended and targeted pre-emptive community support and counselling for troubled families
- encourage nurturant behaviour among both girls and boys
- positive handling of primary to high school transition
- explicit teaching of conflict-resolution skills

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

WHO ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE?

Family arrangements for the participants in this study varied considerably but 51% (36) lived in a conventional nuclear family with a mother, father and siblings at home. Fourteen per cent (10) lived with only their mothers and 7% (5) lived with only their fathers; in both cases there may or may not be siblings as well. Seventeen per cent (12) lived with one biological parent and either a step-parent or partner. Eight per cent (6) lived with grandparents and 3% (2) were fostered. Within the present sample of respondents, no family arrangement was demonstrably more successful than any other in producing resilient children with participants identified as 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' spread fairly equally across all family types.

Of all the participants, 75% (53) claim their mum (or step-mum) and/or their dad (or step-dad) are the most important people in their lives. It is important to bear in mind here that 'importance' does not necessarily mean 'love' although an examination of the participants' responses suggests that this is indeed how the question was generally interpreted. In regard to the 25% of respondents who did not nominate close family members in response to this question, most chose their best friends (one chose her horse), adding that this was because they could talk about 'romantic' or 'relationship' issues with them more easily than they could with parents.

Many respondents did not provide explanations for their claims - they simply listed those family members whom they regarded as important. Some respondents, however, did provide explanations for their choices: some focused on the practical: 'Well my Mum and my Dad are important to me because they've brought me up well and serve food to me and let me live in their house' (14 year old boy); many focused on the emotional bonds: 'Mum and Dad are the most important people in my life because they've always been there for me when I have troubles or a problem' (14 year old girl). One of the more expansive responses came from Scott (15 yrs), a 'resilient' boy who lives at home with both parents:

Scott (15 yrs):

My Mum and Dad are the most important people because they support me through school. They don't like expect me to be a rocket scientist or anything but they're expecting a bit from me. They're expecting for me not to like be sponging off the system and stuff. They want me to get a good job - not like my brother and sister because they don't like do anything. [...] Mum and Dad - yeah - they're always trying to help me. If I need help at school, they'll come in and speak to the teachers and stuff like that. But there's only so much your parents can do for you. You have to do the rest yourself.

Mothers are mentioned frequently by the participants of this study irrespective of whether they live at home. Brendan (14 yrs), for example, is identified as 'non-resilient' and lives with his grandparents while his mother lives interstate:

I: Who are the important people in your life?
Brendan (14 yrs): Mum, Mum and Mum!

Raelene (14 yrs), also 'non-resilient' lives with her father and sees her mother, who lives in another state, only rarely. Meetings between them are usually unsuccessful, but despite this Raelene states that she loves her mother:

Raelene (14 yrs): I'd put my Dad at the top of the list because he's the one that like got me out of trouble and he's just always been there for when I've needed him and when I tried to drop out of school a couple of times, he always seems just to know how to push me back into it and so I'd put him at the top of the list. Then I'd put my Mum because I just love her.
I: Do you keep in contact?
Raelene: Yeah we ring her every weekend and she's coming down for Christmas but I don't really want her to because there might be a big argument with all the family. But Dad says to just do what she wants me to do and then when she goes back we can just get on with our lives again.

Rachel (15 yrs) - a 'resilient' participant - lives with both parents but clearly is very proud of her mother and sees her as a mentor:

Rachel (15 yrs): Mum's gone out and got more jobs because she got a new car not long ago and now she's paying it off. She's also learnt a lot more about how to do your own banking and she's passed that on to me. Dad just keeps this house, there's not really much to say about Dad, but Mum is more with other people and how problems can be solved. Dad doesn't really seem to run into any problems at all. Yeah - Mum's pretty much a life mentor.

For James (14 yrs), both his parents are important to him - as he says 'I idolize my father and my mum' and he goes on to explain how proud he is of them because they have maintained a happy marriage and have achieved career success despite the poverty of their own parents.

Ellie (14 yrs) who is living for the first time with her merchant seaman father, cites him as an important person in her life, although she sees him as clear-sightedly, it seems, as she saw her mother (see P. 18 above). She confesses she has her doubts about him:

Int: Don't you feel you can trust your Dad?
Ellie: I don't know I've heard heaps of stories. It's heaps weird down here because I've never lived

with my Dad before. I don't know, I've heard stories that he deals out cocaine and crap like that and that's coming from my best friend and like Tina wasn't meant to tell me but she overheard her mum and her boyfriend talking and I just get a bit scared - I mean, I went to Dad one day and said 'Do you do drugs?' and he's like 'No' and I said 'You sure?' and he said 'Yeah'.

In making sense of these data, it must be reiterated that 'the family' and the way it is supposed to function is a cultural construction - the image of nurturant, caring adults commanding and receiving filial love and respect in a mutually supportive family unit is a powerful cultural norm with which the respondents would be very familiar. Many participants refer to parental support of various kinds. In addition, in a supplementary question that asked 'Who do you go to if you've got a problem?', mothers and/or fathers were cited by 58% of participants. Many families therefore seem to fit the cultural construction unproblematically.

The incidence of family disruption and/or violence reported in participants' accounts suggests that many other families do not fit the cultural construction and yet 75% of young people claim their parents as the most important (aka most loved) people in their lives. Even if the circumstances of their own families fall short of the normative 'ideal' (e.g. absent, warring, abusive, irresponsible or neglectful parents), the normative construction of 'family' perhaps still influences the way participants see their mothers and fathers. It manifests itself in such examples as Chloe preferring to be with her birth parents than with the foster mother who has cared for her since she was 19 months old; Brendan and Raelene wistfully loving their absent mothers; Ellie reversing custodial roles with her alcoholic mother and troubling father, encouraging the former to stop drinking and asking if the latter 'does drugs'.

According to Maslow (1970), 'belonging' - the need to be connected to some collectivity - is a basic human need. The family is ideally placed to serve this need but not exclusively so. While it is true that a sense of belonging or connectedness is a protective factor associated with resilience in the literature, a nuclear family was no guarantee of resilient children in this study. While this sense of belonging may best be fostered in a supportive family with a mother and a father, it is not automatically disadvantageous to be raised in family settings that are different. Sometimes other protective factors may compensate for a less than 'ideal' family arrangement; sometimes difficult family circumstances can produce the kind of self-reliance and mature insight that is evidenced in Ellie's accounts; sometimes belonging and connectedness can be constructed by seeing one's family in culturally normative terms. Having said this, it is still important to prevent family breakdown where possible and extensive preventative and interventionist strategies are needed to achieve this goal. In addition, caring adults - in the school and/or community - can act as

mentors, helping young people develop compensatory protective factors. School and community can also provide other settings for belonging and connectedness.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- a sense of belonging and connectedness
- positive regard from at least one adult

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- provide opportunities for mentoring in non-family settings (i.e. school, community)
- extended and targeted pre-emptive community support and counselling for troubled families
- provision of alternative settings for belonging and connectedness in school and the wider community

CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS
HOW DO YOU LIKE TO SPEND YOUR TIME?

The young people in the study cite a number of activities and pastimes which are their preferred ways of spending free time. These leisure pursuits range from the gregarious to the solitary; from the formally organized to the informal and spontaneous. No clear differences between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents can be detected, however some clear gender differences are apparent.

The range of the most cited leisure pursuits and the numbers of male and female respondents who refer to them are listed below. Some respondents cite more than one activity:

Leisure Pursuit	%	No.	Female	Male
Spending time with friends	32%	23	18	5
Playing sport	23%	16	8	8
Playing on the computer	17%	12	1	11
Listening to music	15%	11	7	4
Riding my bike	13%	9	0	9
Watching TV	13%	9	4	5
Hobbies	13%	9	5	4
Non-sporting clubs	6%	6	2	4

Spending time with friends

Spending time with friends is the most frequently cited leisure pursuit. Most of these respondents (18) are girls and there are equal numbers identified as 'resilient' and 'non-resilient'. The activities in which the girls engage are usually unstructured, spontaneous comings together, either on the phone or in person, after school and at weekends. As Irena (15 yrs) points out, their chief occupation is talking:

- Irena (15 yrs): Oh, sometimes after school on the way home - because I live just up the road - my friends will stop off and we'll just sit in the room for about half an hour or maybe longer. That's about all I do.
- Int: Do you listen to music with your friends or do you just hang out with them in your room?
- Irena: Oh we usually have the music going. Just talk about school and you know, issues that relate to us and we grump about teachers. That sort of thing.

Among the boys who cited 'spending time with friends', the preference was for more activity-based pursuits such as 'going down the street', or riding bikes with friends.

Sport

Sport was a frequently mentioned pastime by equal numbers of both boys and girls (8) and mostly this activity was formally organized through school or community clubs and associations. Many more team sports (e.g. football) were cited than individual ones (e.g. golf). Eleven respondents are classified as 'resilient' and 5 'non-resilient'. Interestingly, 10 respondents came from the two country schools – a point that will be taken up below.

Playing on the computer

Playing on the computer appears to be a strongly gendered pastime with 11 of the 12 respondents being boys. Of these, 5 are classified as 'resilient' and 6 'non-resilient'. Chris (15 years) is 'resilient' and he enjoys playing so-called 'violent' computer games:

- Int: What do you like to do in your free time?
Chris (15 yrs): I'm either watching TV or maybe playing on the computer or going outside for rides on the bike, it just depends what I'm doing.
- Int: What games have you got on the computer?
Chris: Oh generally, role playing games and shoot em ups.
- Int: Yeah?
Chris: Like I don't like more or less the educational side, I like the violent type games.
- Int: Which ones have you got?
Chris: Shadow Warrior and Mortal Combat IV, Diablo, King Pin, Half Life and some games like that.

Listening to music

Listening to music on CD's or on the radio is a pastime cited by more girls (7) than boys (4). As Kate (15 years) indicates, this activity can be shared with friends or it can be enjoyed alone in one's room:

- Int: What else do you like to do with your time?
Kate (15 yrs): Listen to music.
- Int: Yeah, and you do that in your room?
Kate: Yeah.
- Int: What about listening to music with your friends, do you do that as well?
Kate: Mm, all the time.
- Int: Yeah, what sort of music do you like?
Kate: Oh well basically everything. We like a bit of hip hop and Nirvana and all that stuff.

Bike riding

Bike riding is a pastime enjoyed exclusively by boys (9) in this study. Just 'riding around' or going to special places where riders can practise their 'jumps' is an enjoyable activity for boys like Bryce (13 years):

Int: Okay. And what do you like to do with your free time? How do you like to spend your time?
 Bryce (13 yrs): Riding my bike around. Go for a ride to the Block if I'm allowed to. And go meet Lance - something to do.
 Int: Okay, and you're saying you go to where?
 Bryce: The bike jumps at the Block. Behind K-Mart.

Watching TV and hobbies

Watching TV for relaxation is enjoyed by 9 boys and girls and another 9 refer to specific hobbies that they have: the girls engage in sewing, jewellery-making, painting and reading while fishing, stamp collecting and reading are mentioned by the boys.

Non-sporting clubs or organizations

Organized non-sporting clubs or associations in the community are only mentioned by 6 respondents. These organizations include St. John's Ambulance Brigade, Air and Army Cadets, a school drama club, a local life-saving club and a model aeroplane club.

This snapshot of the way young people spend their free time is, in many ways, unremarkable. Unlike their older peers, young adolescents have a considerable amount of free time because the demands of study have yet to make serious inroads into after-school and weekend leisure time. At the same time, 13 -15 year olds have limited disposable income and thus cannot afford expensive entertainment or costly leisure pursuits. Spending time with friends, riding bikes, taking part in team sports are all low-cost activities that should be readily available to young people.

The analysis yielded few remarkable differences between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents in relation to their use of free time. Both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' girls engaged in 'spending time with friends' equally. Roughly equal numbers of 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' boys spend time riding bikes and playing on the computer. Even when the pastimes are divided into 'solitary' and 'group-oriented' categories there are none of the differences between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' participants that one might expect, given that in the literature, resilience is associated with having friends and being connected to others.

The clear differences in the data are not associated with resilience but with gender and this does not come as a surprise given the socially constructed nature of what counts as appropriate male and female adolescent behaviour in our society. Thus, there are clear differences between boys and girls when it comes to 'talking with friends' - this is a sociable activity typically associated with girls. Activities involving action and tests of skill like bike riding and playing computer games are typically associated with boys. On the other hand, activities like watching TV, engaging in hobbies and listening to music are much less associated with a specific gender and this is borne out by the participants' responses here.

The category of 'playing sport' is an interesting activity in this regard. It is a well-known phenomenon that girls tend to abandon organized sport as they proceed through adolescence (Henderson et al. 1996; Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport 1998), however, in this study boys and girls choose 'playing sport' equally as a favoured leisure pursuit. The 8 girls who chose 'playing sport' range right across the age-spectrum from 12 to 16 years of age, so it is not the case that this category was chosen only by early adolescents. What is most interesting is that 6 of the 8 girls come from the two country towns – only two come from city schools. This pattern of response was not evident for any other leisure pursuit.

Although a community audit was beyond the scope of this study, it is possibly the case that country communities provide more opportunities and support than city ones for young people to engage in activities like organized sport. Certainly, the data seem to bear this out - of the 16 responses in the 'playing sport' category, 10 came from respondents in country schools.

One other set of data bears comment here. It does seem surprising that of all 71 participants, only 6 (8%) claim to be involved in any kind of organized non-sporting clubs or associations.

The fact that the respondents (especially the city ones) so rarely refer to engaging in leisure activities offered by school/community clubs and associations suggests that either there are none or that those that are offered are inappropriate or unattractive to young people. Clearly a role exists here for schools and community organizations. While it is not suggested that all young people's free time should be filled with organized activity, there are considerable benefits to be gained by being involved in, say, a basketball team or a model aeroplane club. There are, for example, opportunities for developing friendship and social skills; opportunities for experiencing achievement and success; opportunities for contact with caring adults beyond the family. All of these constitute protective factors and processes that are associated with resilience.

Communities and schools can also help provide facilities for young people to use for informal social purposes. Safe, comfortable places for young people to congregate to 'just talk'; BMX parks; skateboard installations; community basketball courts and so on, all support young people's needs to meet and socialise without causing the kind of community disapproval that attends such activities as congregating in shopping centres or skateboarding on footpaths and around public buildings.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- few remarkable differences between resilient and non-resilient respondents were identified;
- connectedness, belonging and the development of social skills are served by friendships;
- mastery, achievement and contact with caring adults beyond the family are served by engagement with organized sports and hobbies

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- schools and communities should provide more opportunities for young people to engage in formal, organized sporting and non-sporting activities
- schools and communities should provide more facilities for informal socialisation and activity among young people

<p>CHAPTER 6 DATA ANALYSIS WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR LIFE?</p>
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The question 'What do you like about your life?' was phrased deliberately in a very general way in order to give respondents the broadest possible scope for their answers. Even so, several themes that had appeared in earlier questions, appeared here too. The category of 'hobbies and pastimes' can perhaps be accounted for as an artefact of the positioning of the question immediately after the one asking how participants preferred to spend their free time. Other categories, however, are less easily explained in this way.

Friends and warm relationships

The main theme that emerged from this question concerned the participants' pleasure in having friends and warm relationships with others. Thirty nine percent of respondents (28), specifically referred to this theme and unlike with the previous question, there were no remarkable differences between the responses of boys (11) and girls (17). Nor were there major differences between participants classified as 'resilient' (17) and 'non-resilient' (11). Rosie (15 years) a 'non-resilient' participant, for example, says that what she likes about her life is her group of friends:

Rosie (15 yrs): They might as well be family because we just understand each other and we know what we're thinking usually. I've got a couple of groups of friends, but there's this one group that we just always hang out and play 4-square and stuff like that.

Peter (14 years) is also 'non-resilient' and despite admitting he finds little to like about his life, claims his friends are important to him:

Peter (14 yrs): There's not a lot I like about my life. Not a lot of things make me happy. Sit down with my mates out the back. Have a chat. Like I've got a really good friend. At my birthday party – he says, 'I wonder if there are aliens out there.' I say, 'Oh, you're a dickhead!'

Int: So when you're happiest you're with him?

Peter: I don't see him a lot of the time but I'm usually happy when I'm having a single one-on-one chat with my mates. It's usually like in the middle of the night, we stroll out. Like at my birthday party, we sat there, had a smoke ...

Int: So you just sit and chat about general stuff?

Peter: Stupid things. 'I wonder what aliens are?!!'

Hobbies and pastimes

Of all the participants, 34% (24) claim their hobbies and pastimes are things they like about their lives. Again, few differences emerge in the number of 'resilient' (14) and 'non-resilient' (10) participants making this judgement. The same kinds of pastimes are mentioned here as in Key Question 3 – sport, computers, riding bikes and so on. However, of the 'resilient' participants, more than two thirds (10) cite their participation in organized sport and clubs as what they like most about their lives. Only 3 'non-resilient' participants cite a pastime that could naturally bring them in contact with others and this is bike-riding; the others cite largely solitary activities like playing on the computer and playing with pets.

Families

A big discriminator between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' participants was the theme of 'family' in relation to this question. Of all the participants, 25% (18) cited family members as being what they most liked about their lives. Of these 14 were 'resilient' and 4 'non-resilient' and less than half (8) were from a family with both birth parents. Most 'resilient' respondents simply cited 'my family' or 'my parents' or 'my Mum' without elaboration in response to this question. The 'non-resilient' were more inclined to elaborate and their responses seem less a celebration of 'family' and more a demonstration of need and loss. For Neil (13 years), it's the need to feel safe. He has had a number of disliked 'step-dads' in the past, but he likes the present one because he's not violent towards him:

Int: O.K. Well what do you like about your life then?
Neil (13 yrs): My Dad, my Step-dad. And the Playstation.
And computers.
Int: You said before that you didn't like the other
stepfathers much. How is this one different?
Neil: He's nice. He doesn't bash me. And he's just nice,
yeah.

For Janice (12 years), her need is for her absent mother. Janice lives in the country with her father and his girlfriend while her mother lives in the city. What she likes about her life is when she sees her Mum:

Int: What do you like most about your life?
Janice (12 yrs): Probably when I see my mum.
Int: Yeah? You like to see your mum?
Janice: Yeah.
Int: Just because you don't get to see her often?
Janice: Yeah, well we usually go down every second
weekend or something.
Int: Does she come up and get you or?
Janice: Sometimes she comes up halfway and Dad drives
the other halfway.

Pride in individual skills and personal qualities

Another major discriminator between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' participants was the theme centred round pride in individual skills and

personal qualities. Again, 25% (18) of respondents cite this theme, with 15 classified as 'resilient' and 3 'non-resilient'.

Responses fell pretty evenly into three broad categories: the general or abstract (e.g. 'I just love life'); skills and accomplishments (e.g. 'I like how I can fix things') and personal character traits (e.g. 'I don't get upset over things'). Responses in all of these categories demonstrate a degree of self awareness and personal insight.

The first category of response expressed a kind of abstract *joie de vivre* and was found only among 'resilient' students' responses and then mainly among the girls. Mia (15 years) is typical if rather more expansive than most:

Int: What do you like about your life?
Mia (15 yrs): I don't know - being here, being alive!
Int: You like just being alive?
Mia: Yeah. Breathing the air - even though some of it is polluted.
Int: Yeah?
Mia: Being able to walk, talk, see, hear. Even though there's some people that can't do those things. I feel privileged that I can. I feel sorry for them because they can't. Like they can't see and they're missing the beautiful place where we are.

Pride in personal skills and achievement also accounted for roughly a third of the responses in relation to this theme and boys were more represented here than girls. Eddie (15 years), for example, is 'resilient' and what he likes about his life is his ability to do daring jumps and tricks on his BMX bike - a skill he has been practising for a long time:

Int: Are there some guys that just aren't good at it?
Eddie (15 yrs): They're okay but they just don't try the big jumps and stuff because some of the jumps we do are pretty big .
Int: Yeah?
Eddie: And like I'm pretty scared to do them but I still do them. You do stacks on them. Most of them are doubles and that and there's like a gap in the middle and then if you land on the top of the first one you're pretty stuffed.

Victor (16 years) is proud of the fact that he has developed some real skills involving the fixing and maintaining of computers:

Int: What do you like about your life?
Victor (16 yrs): That I can fix things. Like I can take a computer apart and know what's in there just about.
Int: Brilliant. How does that make you feel? Really confident?
Victor: Yeah because I can buy things at the computer shop and put them in myself.
Int: Right, and you don't have to pay the technician to put it in because they charge heaps don't they?

Victor: Yeah. And I can upgrade the computer myself as well.

Colin (15 years) is pleased with his scholastic accomplishments:

Int: And what do you like about your life?
Colin (15 yrs): I don't know. I like that I'm really smart, it just seems an advantage.
Int: It's an advantage?
Colin: Yeah, with schooling anyway. I can apply through school. I know some kids who are still struggling and some adults are still struggling to do adding up and spelling and stuff, but it's easier for me.

In the final category, equal numbers of 'resilient' boys and girls referred to individual character traits as something they liked about their lives. Jason (13 years) likes: 'That I'm my own person and that I don't try and copy or follow anyone else.' Troy (15 years) likes his persistence with tasks 'I'll have a try at something and if I can't do it I just put it away to one side and go back to it later.' Craig (15 years) has recognised that what he likes about life is '...to spend time on my own.' The girls are equally insightful. Danni (14 years) says: 'I'm glad I don't get easily upset over things.' Molly (14) says: 'I like how I'm friendly and I'll get along with anybody'. Carly (14 years) says: 'I like when I do something good for someone and when I help somebody else out with something.'

The kinds of things that the young respondents mention when talking about what they like about their lives reiterate a number of themes that have already proved salient in relation to other questions. Themes relating to the importance of family and friends; pride in skills and accomplishments and the pleasures associated with particular hobbies and pastimes are all revisited here. While there are no major differences between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students' responses in some of these, others do discriminate quite markedly.

In contrast with the previous question, it is interesting that the importance of 'friends' here is not a strongly gendered theme. This can perhaps be explained by the different emphasis in the two questions. In the previous question, respondents were asked how they liked to spend their time and it was noted that for girls, in particular, there is a strong social expectation to be nurturant, warm, sociable – that girls, more than boys, are expected to invest their time in relationships. The social construction of appropriate behaviour for girls and boys is invoked less by the present question and this may account for the importance of the 'friends' theme among boys and girls, both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient'.

School provides lots of opportunities for developing and maintaining friendships and this is taken up by 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students alike. Clearly there is a powerful impulse to socialise among young people. The strong impression the interviewers got in all schools was that

socialising, not schooling, was at the top of most young people's agendas, especially in Years 8 and 9. What schools and other community organizations need to do is recognize and support this in useful ways.

Although the theme of 'hobbies and pastimes', does not discriminate markedly between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents, it is interesting to note that more than two thirds of the 'resilient' respondents cite participation in organized sporting teams or non-sporting organizations as what they like about their lives. Opportunities for connectedness with others, achievement and mastery, and for contact with adults beyond the family are afforded by this kind of activity and all are strong protective factors found in the resilience literature. As noted in the previous question, the predominance of respondents from the country locations suggests that this need is perhaps rather better served in country communities than city ones.

In answer to the question 'What do you like about your life?', 'my family' (or selected members of it) is cited by a quarter of all respondents, irrespective of their family type (e.g. intact, single-parent, blended). Here 'resilient' students markedly outnumber the 'non-resilient' although they rarely discuss this choice in any detail. A warm, supportive family environment, however it is constituted but containing at least one caring adult, is a strong protective factor cited in the resilience literature. What needs to be borne in mind here is that 'the ideal family' is a cultural construction and that while it is indeed the case that more effort should be put into helping troubled families resolve their differences, caring for and nurturance of children can be successfully carried out by a variety of people either alone or in combination with others.

Some of the responses relating to the theme of 'pride in individual skills and personal qualities' hark back to those found in answer to Key Question 1 and again are associated with 'resilience' rather than 'non-resilience'. A sense of mastery or competence, whether it is doing daring tricks on a bike, knowing one's way around the inside of computers or in traditional scholastic pursuits is strongly associated with 'resilience' in the literature. For young people who are not scholastically inclined, opportunities to develop these skills should not be dependent on parents' abilities to buy expensive equipment (bikes, computers etc). Again, an important role for schools and community organizations in providing opportunities for young people to develop competence in a range of areas is strongly suggested.

The references to internal states and dispositions that many of the young 'resilient' respondents make in relation to this question are particularly interesting. These young people are cognitively capable of thinking about abstract ideas or states; metacognitive awareness and self-reflection are skills that are part of their developing intellectual repertoires. Clearly, such capacities are implicated in all kinds of problem-solving; in planning for the future; in establishing and maintaining relationships; in

developing autonomy – all of which are protective factors and/or processes. Young people should be encouraged to develop these cognitive skills and this level of self awareness and insight because, as the data suggest, they are strongly associated with resilient behaviour.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- connectedness and belonging
- importance of social skills for establishing and maintaining friendships
- positive regard from at least one adult
- achievement, competence and mastery
- higher order thinking skills (metacognition, self awareness)

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- recognition of and support for young adolescents' need to socialise in school
- provision of opportunities for socialising in the community
- provision of more opportunities for achievement and mastery in school and in the community
- encouragement of higher order thinking skills in all adolescents

**CHAPTER 7
DATA ANALYSIS**

ARE THERE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU WISH HADN'T
HAPPENED?

In Key Question 1 respondents were asked to nominate the most important thing that had happened to them in their lives and many of them identified positive things as well as sad, painful or frightening experiences. In the present question, the respondents were deliberately asked to reflect on negative things that had happened in their lives – things they regretted having occurred. Not all participants provided useful answers here. Some claimed they did have regrets but that these were personal matters and they did not wish to discuss them - a position that was, of course, respected.

Three broad categories of response emerge from the data. Of all participants, 31% (22) claimed they had no regrets about anything that had happened in their lives and there were many more 'resilient' respondents (17) than 'non-resilient' (5) represented here. A category labelled 'risky behaviours' accounted for 21% of responses (15) and there were twice as many 'resilient' respondents (10) as 'non-resilient' (5). Twenty per cent of participants (14) referred to 'family troubles' and these responses came equally from young people identified as 'resilient' (7) and 'non-resilient' (7). Participants who did not wish to respond to this question or who gave miscellaneous answers (e.g. regretting they were too short, too fat, not good enough at football or not blonde and so on) accounted for a further 28% of respondents (20)

Risky behaviours

The label 'risky behaviours' covers a multitude of sins ranging from the mildly unwise to the seriously dangerous. More 'resilient' than 'non-resilient' participants are represented in this category but what distinguishes the two groups is the way in which respondents talk about their indiscretions. The 'resilient' participants generally talk about such things as bad habits, fighting and stealing as having occurred when they were younger; there is a sense that the person who is talking to the interviewer has moved on from being the person who did these things in the first place. Eddie (15 years) for example regrets he took up smoking and has a juvenile police record:

- Int: Anything that you look back and think, I wish I hadn't done that, or I wish that hadn't happened?
- Eddie (15 yrs): Smoking - when I was younger.
- Int: Yeah?
- Eddie: I don't smoke now. I stopped.
- Int: So, any other regrets?
- Eddie: Yeah, beating up people at primary school, getting records and that, like police records for doing it. I was in Year 6.
- Int: So you've got a police record for that?

Eddie: Yeah, it's not so good.
 Int: I didn't think you could get them that young.
 Eddie: Yeah, you can get them but it's a juvenile one though. It gets wiped out when you turn 18.

Some respondents indicate how they have gone about changing their behaviour. Michelle (16 years), for example, has some regrets that she won't talk about but she does admit that she stole money from her mother when she was younger. She has 'worked through' or dealt with the problems that caused her to behave in ways she now regrets :

Michelle (16 yrs): I won't talk about those things because they're a bit personal, but one thing I regretted was when I was younger I stole money from Mum and got in trouble.
 Int: So are these major or minor things?
 Michelle: Just minor, no major.
 Int: Cool. And when you've had these problems have you had any strategies to try and fix them?
 Michelle: Like you mean, work through them? Yeah, I don't regret them as much now as I did back then, but yeah, I worked through it.
 Int: Did you get other people to help?
 Michelle: Yeah.

Like several boys, Adam (13 years) regrets his violent temper and behaviour. This is still something that he struggles with but he now has a strategy for dealing with situations where he feels he cannot control himself. The school has been instrumental here in helping him cope:

Int: Have you got any regrets about your life? Things you wished you hadn't done, or things you could do differently if you could?
 A: Oh yeah a lot of things. I have a lot of scars that I shouldn't have got in fights. That's about it.
 Int: What makes you angry?
 A: When I don't usually get my own way. I just have a temper tantrum. I throw things around. Chairs. I don't pick up any more tables because I hurt somebody at footy.
 Int: How do you respond when something makes you angry? Like, to cool off, what do you do?
 A: I walk out of the class and I ignore everything around me and I just sit down, or just walk out the classroom and come back in 10 minutes because I'm on a contract at school that says if I don't do that I'll get suspended and I can get excluded for 10 weeks.

So, the 'resilient' students put distance between themselves and their indiscretions; they have dealt with (or are dealing with) their problems and they have strategies for doing this.

Among the 'non-resilient' participants, the misdemeanours are similar but more recent and there is less sense that these were childhood

indiscretions from which painful but salutary lessons were learnt. Apart from recognizing the actions were dangerous or wrong, these young people appear to have no strategies in place for preventing similar incidents in the future. Kirsten, for example, is a very mature looking 13 year old who talks a lot about her romantic associations with older boys. She is also often out late at night. This can lead to situations that even Kirsten perceives as risky:

Kirsten (13 yrs): We did something that weren't very smart a few weekends ago. We went for a walk down the beach at about 12.30 at night - there were four of us, me, Allie, Amy and Joy. We seen these four guys down the beach and we started talking and that and one of them, cause he only lived down the road, he told us to go back to his house. So we did and we had no idea who they were and we went back with them and we were there until about 2.30 in the morning. Then we decided to go back to Amy's and we got in the car with some dude we didn't know, some P plater - we were just talking to him and then we went with him. If my mum found out, she'd ground me till I'm 30!

Peter (14 years) recounts an horrific incident where he beat up another boy. Lest this incident be thought the result of an over-active imagination, a friend of Peter's, who was also a participant in the study, independently corroborated the story.

Int: Okay, so what about regrets. Do you have any regrets about your life?
Peter (14 yrs): Yeah, beating the shit out of a kid with a baseball bat. I wish he hadn't come on to me. He's lucky he came away with just a couple of broken ribs and a broken nose. If I hadn't seen that cop car hanging out in the street, he would have been worse than that.
Int: So you stopped because you saw the cop car?
Peter: And the simple fact that I thought I was going to kill him by accident because I gave him a couple of blows to the forehead.

Karl (15 years) rams his fist through windows when angry; Simon (15 years) recently got caught shoplifting; Gina (14 years) hung around with 'psychos and druggies' who beat her up. All these young people regret these incidents but they convey little confidence in their ability to control their lives to prevent similar things happening in the future.

Autonomy is generally understood as the ability to take control of life and change things that are unsatisfactory; self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of doing this. Both of these concepts help explain the responses of the young people here. In talking about behaviours they now regret, the 'resilient' students demonstrate their capacity to change their behaviour, take some control and solve problems by applying strategies (Michelle

talked her problems through; Adam has a routine for managing his temper). On the other hand, the 'non-resilient' respondents seem largely at the mercy of their impulses and rely on outside authority to control them (Peter stopped his attack partly because he saw the police; Kirsten looks to her mother to prevent her from behaving in a risky fashion). It is important to note that Adam's school, through its behaviour management policies, is helping him to take control of his previously ungovernable temper – a valuable first step in the development of autonomy.

Family troubles

An equal number of both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents talk about events concerning their families which they wished had never happened. Death of a sibling or a parent is a deeply traumatic event that is mentioned on two occasions.

Predictably, the break-up of families is something that features strongly in response to this question. Brendan (14 years) regrets that his mother now lives interstate and that he rarely gets to see her. Brooke (14 years) wishes that her mum and dad were still together. Leah (16 years) wished she'd done more to keep her siblings and her father together when her family broke up. Mia (15 years) regrets never having seen her father although she is supposed to be a lot like him:

Mia (15 yrs): My Mum always tells me that I look like him and I act like him. I've never met him. He left my Mum and my real sister when she was only little and my Mum was pregnant with me. She left him because he used to beat her up and all that stuff – that's what she said. I want to hear both stories but I'm not old enough to go and find him yet.

Difficulties with a parent's new partner are a particular source of regret. Janice (14 years) regrets choosing to stay with her father '...and him getting a girlfriend who lives with us' because she finds this person very difficult. Daniel (14 years) regrets 'That my Mum met this bloke who's her husband now' because he hits Daniel.

The lived reality for most respondents in this study involves attachment to people they identify as family even though the original family has broken up. The sense of loss conveyed in many of the young people's responses speaks of real attachments to parents (in particular), with all their faults and weaknesses. A sense of what a family should be - the cultural construction of the family - probably shapes their feelings to a degree, however this does not make the emotional impact of family break-up easier to bear and 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' children alike suffer the pain of loss.

Given that all the young people in this study were originally identified as being 'at risk' and that the data so far have provided some glimpses into

seriously troubled and/or disrupted lives, it seems surprising that nearly a third of the participants claim that nothing had happened in their lives that they wished hadn't happened. There are probably several ways of explaining this, but the least speculative and the most plausible is indicated by the fact that more than three times as many 'resilient' respondents as 'non-resilient' claim to have no regrets about their lives.

The term 'resilience' means to bounce back or recover quickly from trouble, injury and other adverse circumstances. In the literature, resilience is associated with optimism, a future-orientation, autonomy and a refusal to be overwhelmed or determined by bad events. It seems likely that participants in this study who had been identified as demonstrating resilient behaviour would deal with difficult lives in more positive ways than those identified as 'non-resilient' and thus would look forwards rather than backwards. Regrets, of course, are by definition backwards-looking and are therefore less likely to be an orientation adopted by 'resilient' young people.

Clearly if we wish young people to engage in fewer risky behaviours, we need to be teaching them how to resist their impulses and take control of their lives. Bad tempers and bad habits are not permanent characteristics like having blue eyes – bad tempers can be managed and bad habits can be unlearned. Schools are well placed to assist here but they should by no means be left to handle this responsibility alone. All organizations that come in contact with the young can play a role here.

The break-up of a family is a highly stressful event that young people are ill-equipped to deal with. Effort directed at identifying families in trouble and supporting them through difficult times should be a priority on the basis that prevention is better than cure. In the event of irretrievable family break-down, support for young people as they handle feelings of loss and regret is important.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- personal autonomy, agency and self efficacy
- problem-solving skills and strategies
- a sense of connectedness and belonging

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- explicit teaching of personal efficacy skills; teach young people to take control of their lives
- extended and targeted pre-emptive community support and counselling for troubled families
- support and counselling for young people experiencing family disruption

CHAPTER 8
DATA ANALYSIS
WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF IN YOUR LIFE?

Self esteem, or the capacity to feel good about oneself, is strongly associated with resilience in the literature. As many psychologists have pointed out however, self esteem is neither genetically determined nor can it be conjured out of nothing. Achievement, in some form or field that is valued by the individual, is required for self esteem to develop (Seligman 1995; Damon 1977).

The present question was designed to enable respondents to talk about things that they were proud of – things that in their own terms constituted an achievement of some kind. Understanding the things that many ‘at risk’ young people both value and have the capacity to achieve, enables informed and better-targeted policy making.

Worryingly, 10% (7) of all participants claimed they had nothing to be proud of in their lives. All of these respondents were ‘non-resilient’. Even when prompted, people like Janice (12 years) could think of nothing:

Int:	Is there anything that you’re proud of in your life? Something you’ve done or something?
Janice (12 yrs):	Don’t know.
Int:	Sport or something?
Janice:	No.
Int:	Anything at school? Like a piece of work you’ve done or something you’ve made?
Janice:	Not that I can think of.
Int:	How about socially?
Janice:	No.

For those who were proud of something, the biggest category that emerged from the data was ‘sporting achievement’, with 28% of respondents (20) citing achievements here. This category discriminated markedly between ‘resilient’ and ‘non-resilient’ participants with three times more of the former (15) than the latter (5) claiming to be proud of sporting success. Another category was ‘school achievement’ with 17% of all participants claiming pride in success at school. Nearly twice as many ‘resilient’ students (11) than ‘non-resilient’ ones (6) were represented here. Interesting differences in the achievements they claim draw attention to the fact that success is a relative concept. Pride in skills other than those that could be subsumed under ‘sporting achievements’ or ‘school achievement’ were cited by 15% (11) of respondents and 13% (9) were proud of their families. Some respondents cited more than one achievement of which they were proud and there were a few miscellaneous choices which were difficult to classify (e.g. ‘I’m proud of my turtle’, ‘I’m proud I live in a house and not on the streets’)

Sporting achievement

Irrespective of whether they come from a 'sporting' family or not, most children learn at an early age that being good at sport is highly valued in Australian society.

Although there was a marked difference between the 'resilient' and the 'non-resilient' respondents in the number of times that pride in sporting achievement was cited, there was no difference between boys and girls in this regard. The kinds of sports mentioned included both individual sports like long-distance running and team games like football, basketball, netball and competitive swimming. The ways in which some respondents judged they were good at the sport was that they had received tangible rewards in the form of medals, trophies, certificates and parental support and praise. Owen (12 years) is a 'resilient' respondent who receives support from his absent father:

Int: And is there something in your life that you're proud of?
Owen (12 yrs): Playing football. I'm really proud of that. I didn't get a certificate or anything this year but I'm really happy I can just get in there, get in the pack. Whenever I get hurt, my Dad just – when I talk to him on the phone after the match, he just goes: 'Well you've got to keep getting up'.

Talia (15 years), a 'resilient' student has won many trophies:

Talia (15 yrs): I'm probably proud because I'm going in my Mum's footsteps kind of thing and because I'm getting a lot of trophies. I've got one each year.
Int: In what?
Talia: Netball. I played for the State junior team in Adelaide so I was pretty happy.

Among the 5 'non-resilient' participants, Jaclyn (14 years) is proud of winning the Best and Fairest medal at netball and Shannon (13 years) is pleased because she's playing a traditionally male sport in her local area:

Int: What are you proudest of?
Shannon (13 yrs) Oh probably 'cause I'm the first girl to play cricket for the Rivermead and Wallston team I think. I'm the only girl playing at the moment - the boys treat me O.K., so that's alright.

While winning championships and medals is not something that all young sportsmen and women can do, just being part of a sporting team and to have specific physical skills seems to satisfy most of the respondents in this study – any tangible rewards are a bonus. The rural areas, once again, appear to be presenting more opportunities for sporting activity than the city; only one city school was noteworthy in having a number of respondents claiming they were proud of their sporting achievement.

As has been mentioned before, the benefits from taking part in organized sporting activity are numerous – participants learn social skills and personal discipline; there are opportunities for contact with responsible adults beyond the family; there are opportunities for socialising; negative feelings and frustrations can be burnt off through vigorous activity; persistence and effort are rewarded and, of course, there are opportunities for achievement, mastery and competence in the development of physical skills. While being involved in organized sport is not something that all young people relish, it is nevertheless true that, in this study, substantially more ‘resilient’ than ‘non-resilient’ respondents were involved in sport. The self esteem that can flow from knowing one can do something well may account for some of that resilience.

School achievement

School, absorbing as much time as it does of a young person’s life, is ideally placed to provide all young people with experiences of success, achievement, mastery and competence. In the light of this, it is disappointing that only 17% of all respondents claim to be proud of achievements in this area. Interestingly, the ways in which the ‘resilient’ and ‘non-resilient’ respondents talk about their achievements draw attention to the fact that success is always a relative concept for individuals. While the ‘resilient’ claim high grades and other indicators of achievement, many of the successes claimed by the ‘non-resilient’ are modest by comparison.

Most of the ‘resilient’ students claim high grades as indicators of their success in school (‘I’m proud of getting good grades’). Colin (16 years) is ‘smart’ at academic school subjects and he’s proud of it:

Colin (15 yrs): Well, I like Maths, English, Science you know all that sort of stuff – mainly the thinking subjects. I don’t mind sport, but it’s not my favourite. I don’t really enjoy Woodwork and stuff like that but the Maths, the English and the Science and the spelling and all that stuff – yeah, I like all that and I’m top of the class too.

Two ‘non-resilient’ respondents are proud of high grades although this is a new experience for them: Simon (15 years) says ‘I got my first few A’s in the last couple of terms.’ Karl (15 years) says:

Karl (15 yrs): I’m proud of getting my first A I’ve ever got.
Int: Yeah? When did you get that?
Karl: Year 8.
Int: What did you get that for?
Karl: Religion.

Others claim they are proud of their work in the Work Experience placements that they had undertaken in the previous term and Brooke (14 years) is proud she has made an effort this term:

Brooke (14 yrs): I'm doing good this term because last term I used to be a little shit. I was heaps rude.

Int: What made you change?

Brooke: I don't know, it's just that I don't want to do bad in school because I don't want my Mum to get upset and I want to have good reports in high school so I can get a good job.

Int: And you're proud of what you've done this term?

Brooke: Yeah. I had to catch up on my science work and in two lessons I did nearly half of my book.

Int: I bet the teacher was impressed.

Brooke: Yes!

Achievement, mastery and competence - in a range of areas - should be achievable goals for all students. Given that, it is worrying that so few students in this study feel they can be proud of their achievements in school. Children identified as 'at risk' are likely to present at school with a range of problems – for example, low motivation, depression, behaviour management problems, irregular attendance. Schools need considerable extra resources and access to professional expertise to recognize and deal with these issues if they are to get on with the business that they do best – teaching and helping students learn and achieve.

While it is the case that schools can (and should) set achievable academic goals for all students, it is true that traditional academic subjects have become unattractive to large numbers of students. Many schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas, are providing students with vocational or at least, non-academic areas of study, which have the advantage of being seen as relevant to students' futures as workers. This should be encouraged, supported and valued provided these subjects are not seen as a 'no-brain' option. Problem-solving, strategy use and intellectual discipline can be applied equally well to trade/para-professional-oriented subjects, as they can to maths or language.

High grades are the universally recognized indicator of success but not all students will receive them. While it is acknowledged that education systems and many parents oblige schools to use norm-referenced grading systems, there should be more encouragement of grading that recognises individual achievement and progress (criterion-based assessment). In this way, low-achieving students who make personal gains will be rewarded and they can see their achievement as a genuine reason for pride and self esteem.

Other skills

Of all the young people in this study, 15% (11) indicated that there were skills, other than those acquired on the sports-field or in the classroom, that they were proud of. Many of these skills will be familiar from responses to previous questions – they include fixing and making things; belonging to organizations like the Army and CFS cadets and St John's Ambulance Brigade where the members learn useful skills and render service to the community. There were few differences between the

'resilient' and the 'non-resilient' participants. Neil (13 years), for example is 'non-resilient' and can make things:

Neil (13 yrs): When I'm playing with my matchsticks building a house or something and I actually make it. And with my Lego, I've got this Lego stuff with all the motors - I've got some of that. I can make good stuff with that. That makes me proud.

Hobbies and pastimes enable young people who do not play sport and/or are not scholastically inclined to develop skills of which they can be proud. It is therefore of some concern that so few young people in this study had these kinds of pursuits. Joseph (12 years) is lucky to have a father in the CFS and so he has become involved in this organization as a cadet. Others like Victor (16 years), Eddie (15 years) and Neil (13 years) taught themselves to fix and make things through tinkering with old computers, electrical equipment and construction kits. Jenny (14 years) learnt to make pottery at school. None of these young people is involved in any kind of organization designed to cater specifically for the needs and interests of young people.

Although it must be emphasised that this study undertook no community audit to assess the availability of clubs and associations for the young in each area, the low involvement of the participants in this study in such organizations suggests once again that these kinds of opportunities are either not available or are unattractive to young adolescents.

Families

Among the respondents who claimed they were proud of their families, there were twice as many classified as 'non-resilient' than 'resilient'. The most interesting thing about these responses was that the 'non-resilient' participants tended to be proud of older brothers and sisters for their achievements. Dwayne (15 years), for example, is proud of his older sisters:

Dwayne (15 yrs): I'm proud of my sisters.
Int: Why's that?
Dwayne: Cathy's smart. She's at Uni studying Sports Science and she's like into modelling and stuff.
Int: I see.
Dwayne: And Stella's smart. She's got a great group of friends that she does lots of stuff with.

Perhaps this type of response is an indication of the kind of hero-worship that younger siblings can develop for older ones in close-knit families. Certainly older siblings can act as role models for younger ones and if the latter are proud of the formers' achievements, this is perhaps a good thing. It is just a little worrying, however, that these young people do not claim pride in any of their own achievements. It is hard to build personal self The data here clearly point to the necessity for young people to experience achievement, mastery and competence in a whole range of areas. As far as

academic and physical skills are concerned, this is of course the school's core business. Too often, however, teachers are unable to focus on what they need to do to help young people learn because of other factors. Resources are needed to provide students with access to a whole range of support services – teachers will then be able to focus on the skills involved in teaching and learning.

Communities in which schools are embedded should also be proactive in providing clubs and associations where the young may learn skills and apply them in some form of recreation or community service. For many young people who are neither academically nor athletically inclined, learning how to do things and being of service to others are important factors in the development of self worth.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- achievement, mastery, competence
- self esteem and self efficacy

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- resources for schools to provide extensive social, counselling and other kinds of support for troubled children
- re-focus teachers on teaching for mastery
- extend the range of rigorous vocationally-oriented subjects in school
- grade low-achievers on personal effort and gains
- schools and communities to provide clubs and associations that provide opportunity for skill development and community service

CHAPTER 9 DATA ANALYSIS

HAVE YOU SOME PLANS FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT DO YOU THINK MAY HELP OR HINDER YOU IN ACHIEVING THOSE PLANS?

The first part of this question was designed to reveal the extent to which the respondents were projecting into the future; the extent to which they had some life goals and dreams. The question was very open and it was expected that these young people might speculate about their prospects for leaving home, getting married, having families and travelling as well as what work they saw themselves doing. It came as something of a surprise then, to find that nearly all participants constructed their answers around the concept of their future work.

Plans for the future

Among the 38 'resilient' participants 89% (33) identified, with little hesitation, a quite specific occupational goal that they were working towards. Among these choices there were a few youthful dreams of achieving fame and fortune through professional sport, fashion or the entertainment industry. Setting these to one side, half the occupational goals cited were white-collar/professional in nature and would require considerable post-secondary study in a higher education institution (e.g. lawyer, accountant, archaeologist, teacher, forensic pathologist, zoologist, marine biologist, doctor, musician, information technologist). The other choices were skilled-trade occupations that would require varying amounts of post-secondary training at TAFE or through one of the armed services (e.g. carpenter, electrician, chef, animator, interior decorator, hairdressing, child-care worker, flight attendant, photographer, motor mechanic). Both city and country participants had a mix of professional and skilled-trade occupational goals.

There was nothing tentative about the ways in which the 'resilient' students talked about their future plans. Many knew what the job entailed and had done some research about what they needed to do in order to achieve their aims. Owen (12 years) is immensely enthusiastic about becoming an archaeologist:

- Int: Why archaeology?
Owen (12 yrs): I don't know. Just going through mummies' tombs and looking at their faces. [...] An archaeologist about Egypt and Greece and all this stuff, that would be something I'd really like.
- Int: Have you talked about this with any adults?
Owen: I've written a book. Like it's an A4 book. It's fairly thick. The headings are like 'Archaeologist', 'Paleontologist', 'Historian' and all this stuff and I've researched everything to see what they actually do, where they do it, when they do it and all different things like that. How much they get.

Jasmine (14 years) wants to be a forensic pathologist after having developed an interest in this field from watching videos. In order to pursue this goal she knows she needs to get good grades and go to university. She is, however faced with the dilemma of many teenagers: how to keep herself in funds without jeopardising her grades. She thoughtfully weighs up the pros and cons here:

- Jasmine (14 yrs): I want to go to uni to learn to be a forensic pathologist.
- Int: Why's that?
- Jasmine: I don't know, just like how you watch videos and stuff and how the forensic team and people that do autopsies and stuff like – the way they find out stuff. It's just so interesting.
- Int: So you've researched forensic pathology?
- Jasmine: Oh sort of. I know that I need really high grades for it. It's really annoying though because I heaps want to get a job for money. When I need money my parents will give it to me but if it's something important, or if I just need money to have, I think a job would be good. But then I look at my friends and since they've got jobs, their grades have dropped and I don't want my grades to drop. If I keep going I'll have a fairly good chance of getting into the uni course that I want.

Craig (15 years) wants to be a marine biologist and knows how much study is ahead of him

- Colin (15 yrs): My plans for the future? Hopefully finish off school and then I'll have to go to, I think it's Queensland, to finish off the rest of my studies, then hopefully marine biology.
- Int: So you've got to go to uni for that – how long will it take?
- Colin: I think it's six years after Year 12

The level of confidence that the 'resilient' students demonstrate in their immediate, precise and often detailed answers to this question was not as apparent among the responses of the 'non-resilient' respondents. Among the 33 participants identified as 'non-resilient', 51% (17) cited a specific occupational goal. Of these two were white-collar/professional (lawyer, archaeologist), 12 were skilled-trade occupations (child care worker, electrician, carpenter, police officer) or armed services positions and 3 were unskilled or semi-skilled occupations (rubbish dump worker, general hand, truck driver). A further 18% (6) of respondents answered this question in terms that generally referred to the importance of work in their future plans but they did not mention a specific occupation.

The 'non-resilient' students tend to talk about potential occupations in a more tentative way. There is little indication that enquiries have been made about what the job requires and little enthusiasm or detail is evinced about the choice. Several boys, like Paul (14 years), talk about

following in their fathers' footsteps but there is little indication that this is a considered career choice:

- Paul (14 yrs): Well I was thinking of working at the dump with my Dad most of the time. He's going to ask how old you have to be to work there so I can set up cans and bottles and all that.
- Int: How long would you want to do that for?
- Paul: Until I get fired I guess or until I quit or something.

Derek (14 years) has a father who drives trucks:

- Derek (14 yrs): I'd rather do something different to what my Dad's doing but since he's getting good money, it's a kind of a good way to do it - be a truckie as well.
- Int: What about other ways of earning good money that you might want to do?
- Derek: I don't know because I don't really want to go to college or anything. I can't wait for school to end. You don't need to be well-educated to be a truckie but you've just got to know like the forms and stuff and how to fill it out and to do kilometres and petrol and, yeah, and get all stuff like that.

Some of the 'non-resilient' respondents, like Bernie (15 years), indicate a level of anxiety about the future that was not detectable in the responses of the 'resilient' students.

- Bernie (15 yrs): Next year I'll probably be back at school. And I'll probably leave school like if there's a job that's good and I'll take it. Or when I finish, if I get to Year 12. I'll just take anything as long as it's good money. I worry about it though.
- Int: What do you worry about?
- Bernie: Just like what am I going to do after school. Because I don't really know.
- Int: When do you worry about this - when you're with your friends or when you're on your own?
- Bernie: No it's when I'm alone at home. I just think 'What am I going to do after school?' I'll probably work in the vineyards or something - but just thinking 'What am I qualified to do?'

Perhaps the question 'What are your plans for the future?' sounds a little like the traditional question asked of young people 'And what are you going to do when you grow up?'. Certainly that was the way it was interpreted, with only a handful of respondents making reference to plans other than those to do with work. Even among the youngest respondents, the primacy of 'work' was evident.

The current discourses surrounding 'work' seemed well understood by the respondents - there was much emphasis on 'getting a good job' or a 'job

with good money' and a lurking sense that being unemployed was unacceptable. The 'resilient' students seemed much more ready than the 'non-resilient' to accept the necessity of training and/or higher education in order to achieve their career goals. These young people also were more likely to talk about their choices with enthusiasm and to display a keen interest in their chosen field. 'Non-resilient' students, on the other hand, saw the necessity of work very clearly but rarely indicated that work might also be pleasurable. There were few differences in academic ability between the two groups of respondents – students in both the 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' groups were spread across the ability range from 'doing well in school' to 'doing poorly in school'. Despite this, very few 'non-resilient' students had professional aspirations.

The different attitudes towards possible futures demonstrated by the two groups is of concern. These differences may be accounted for in terms of different access to career information, different levels of encouragement to consider fulfilling work options or low self esteem and low levels of autonomy among 'non-resilient' respondents. All of these factors can be addressed at the level of the school.

The second part of this Key Question asked respondents what they thought could either help or hinder them in achieving their goals. Doing well in school was universally recognized as crucial to future success but there was ambivalence about whether schools and teachers were actually going to be helpful in this regard.

Good grades

Nearly all respondents expressed the understanding that if they were going to achieve their goals they needed to do well in school to what ever level was appropriate. Roughly a quarter of all respondents (17) spread across both 'resilient' (7) and 'non-resilient' (10) groups expressed concern that they may not be able to keep up with the pressure of schooling. Michelle (16 years) is identified as 'resilient' and is quite clear-sighted about her own vulnerability:

Michelle (16 yrs): A problem for me is trying to keep motivated because if I get bored or something I just won't do it. Yeah, that's probably a big obstacle for me. If I'm good at a subject then I'll keep trying, and then if I'm not as good I'll try harder, but sometimes it's just too hard to do and then I tend to drop back a bit which is something I also have trouble with, because I get bored with it.

Gina (14 years), identified as a 'non-resilient' student, has problems actually getting her work done:

Gina (14 yrs): Bad grades will certainly stuff things up. If I had good grades I'll be able to get a good job.
Int: Why do you think you get bad grades?

- Gina: Because I don't do the work. I just can't do my work. I don't know why, but I just end up never getting any work done.
- Int: You mentioned earlier that your Mum wants you to be smart like her – do you think you're smart?
- Gina: No. Well, I could be if I done my work but I never do.

Like Gina, Hamish (14 years), is 'non-resilient' and he also sees his own behaviour as being a problem in relation to getting good grades:

- Int: What might stop you from doing what you want to do?
- Hamish (14 yrs): My behaviour and stuff, like I might not get a good report. I prefer to muck about. I might not make it. I might just stuff up somewhere and might not be able to get a good report or anything – I might like fail or something and have to do it all again.

Cherie (14 years), who is 'non-resilient', is particularly aware of a potential pitfall for girls:

- Cherie (14 yrs): I won't be able to do anything I want if I don't go all the way through school.
- Int: And what might stop you from going all the way through school?
- Cherie: Like what happened to my friend could happen to me, like fall pregnant heaps young.

Although among 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students alike there are anxieties about their capacities to achieve good grades – the prerequisite for getting a good job – the 'non-resilient' tend to take a fatalistic attitude towards problems that are actually under their own control. While Michelle at least has some strategies for dealing with low motivation, Gina, Hamish and Cherie all talk about their problems as though they have no choices – no choice about getting work done, or mucking about or falling pregnant. This is yet further evidence of the low levels of personal autonomy among 'non-resilient' respondents that have been demonstrated in previous questions.

Although no direct testing of students was carried out, interviewers inferred from respondents' difficulties reading the check-list and other printed interview material, that many of them had problems with literacy. Clearly, the capacity to attain good grades in secondary school is totally dependent on being, at the very least, functionally literate. Although this study cannot provide firm evidence, it's suggested that a reasonable hypothesis worth testing is that 'non-resilience' is strongly correlated with poor literacy skills.

Many teachers make the assumption that basic literacy is dealt with at primary school and that their job is to introduce students to the higher-order literacy skills associated with the different subjects undertaken and

the types of tasks required at secondary level. In addition, most secondary teachers would not consider themselves to have the expertise to teach basic literacy skills. Poor literacy skills will ensure that students cannot (and will not) continue their secondary education. If this hypothesis is correct, then special programs (like the LAP programs that have been so successful in primary schools) are essential to deal with this very basic impediment to resilience.

Schools

More 'resilient' than 'non-resilient' students found school instrumental in assisting them in achieving their goals. The most common theme here, coming from 51% of all respondents (36), concerned specific subjects that students found interesting and relevant to their futures; of these, 27 were identified as 'resilient' and 9 were 'non-resilient'. 'Resilient' students appear to be much better able to see the purpose and value of certain subjects and skills taught in school. Jason (13 years), for example says:

Jason (13 yrs): I think school's helpful because otherwise I would still be like some people, not able to read or write. There's a few people in my class who can't read properly.
Int: Are they in Year 8 with you?
Jason: Yeah.
Int: Why hasn't school helped them?
Jason: Because some of them just didn't pay attention when they were being taught.

Jonathon (15 years) sees the subjects he takes in quite instrumental terms and also makes the distinction between subjects he likes and subjects he needs:

Jonathon (15 yrs): School's not helpful all the time. Like certain subjects like History and that, if I want to work in something like woodwork or electronics I don't think I'll really need history. P.E? I'll probably need my physical education because I want to get a job with the Air Force and I'll probably need to have general stamina and stuff like that – because you have to be able to run. Drama? I don't think I'll need that but it's something I enjoy doing.

While 'non-resilient' students also saw the school's role in instrumental terms, they were more inclined to see the school hindering their ability to achieve their goals. Of all participants, 24% (17) responded in this way and many more 'non-resilient' students (16) than 'resilient' (1) were represented here. They were, for example, more likely to question the value of academic subjects. Kirsten (13 years), finds Society and Environment's material of questionable value:

Kirsten (13 yrs): When I think about it, school is just a waste of time. Like in Society and Environment we're doing the Sumerians. Where is that going to get

me? It's not as if I'm going to be using that in the future. Or Ancient Greece – it's not as if I'm going to be using that.

Gina (14 years) sees the school's role entirely in job-preparation terms:

Int: So how could schools be more helpful do you think?
Gina (14 yrs): They should become 'enterprise high schools' like Salisbury High because at least all Salisbury High kids are getting work – it's not so much to do with getting to Year 12, it's like getting the job that you want to do. I was just about to get a job when I got bashed up and then I had to come here.

Karl (15 years), far from seeing school as helpful, sees it actually preventing him from doing what he wants:

Karl (15 yrs): The school is holding me back.
Int: What from?
Karl: Well, the things I want to do. I just can't do it because school's in the way.
Int: If you weren't in school, what would you be doing?
Karl: I'd probably be in a trade like carpentry or something like that. I'd be like working down on the farm or something.

One other theme emerges in relation to the school's role in helping young people achieve their aims and this echoes the theme of friendship and the need to socialise that emerged in Key Question 4. Of all participants, 14% (10) talk about the school's value to them as a social centre and there were equal numbers of 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' respondents here. For Janice (14 years), school's role as a social centre comes before it's role as a learning centre:

Janice (14 yrs): Yeah, school's helpful because sometimes when you're not happy, say in a situation at home, you can come here and be surrounded by friends and they make you feel heaps better and it's very good, because you learn a lot of stuff as well.

For Martin (15 years), it's recess and lunch-time that make school worthwhile:

Martin (15 yrs): Yeah, school's good. 'Cos there's lunch-time and recess and you get to hang around with your mates and like talk and play 4-square and stuff.

On the whole, more participants see school as playing a positive rather than a negative role in helping them achieve their goals and that role is seen in very instrumental, work-oriented terms. This makes it difficult for schools to involve students in subjects that they do not see as obviously relevant to future work. Subjects like Drama, Society and Environment, Science have intrinsic value for all students but may need

to be 'sold' in different kinds of ways if they are to engage all students effectively.

It is of particular concern that 'non-resilient' students make largely negative responses to this question. For many of these students, schools do not offer the sorts of subjects they perceive as relevant to their future work. Better 'selling' of traditional subjects and availability of more vocationally-oriented subjects may assist here in encouraging young adolescents to attend school regularly and to stay on past the statutory leaving age.

The role that school can play as a centre for socialising among young adolescents should also not be under-estimated.

Teachers

Irrespective of whether respondents were classified as 'resilient' or 'non-resilient', there were few differences between the two groups when it came to identifying the characteristics of helpful and unhelpful teachers. The accounts of student-teacher interaction from which the respondents drew their conclusions were, however, considerably more positive coming from 'resilient' students' than they were from 'non-resilient'.

In general terms, then, helpful teachers are, in order of importance:

- able to render effective help when asked;
- they are fair in their dealings with students;
- they are respectful of students and able to cut a little slack when they know a student is in difficulty;
- they are friendly and kind;
- they are competent in their subject areas and able to control a class

'Effective help' is defined as being able to explain things clearly and being willing to explain things several times and in different ways if necessary. Jason (13 years), who is classified as 'resilient' says:

Jason (13 yrs): Helpful teachers just tell me where I've gone wrong and how I can improve it but unhelpful ones, they just give me a grade and tell me next time it's got to be better. They don't like tell me where I've gone wrong or where I was right.

Danni (14 years) is 'resilient' and cites the example of a particular teacher who is truly helpful:

Danni (14 yrs): Some teachers will just go 'rah, rah, rah' and will just say it all to everybody, but Miss Gill will go individually to everybody and say 'This is how you do it'. And then she says 'If you don't understand, ask me again in a minute.' Other teachers, after they've explained something, if

someone says 'I don't understand', they'll go 'Too bad I already explained it.'

Lachlan (16 years), is classified as 'resilient' and he has experienced teachers who will go out of their way to help him:

Lachlan (16 yrs): Most of the teachers that I've had have gone out of their way and given me notes that I need for particular exams and just explained to me what I specifically need to study. Instead of like the whole book, because I'm a bit of a swotty reader, so stuff like that.

Teachers' capacity to be 'fair' in their dealings with students is another major theme that emerged. 'Non-resilient' students talk a great deal about being 'picked on' by teachers. Brooke (14 years) is 'non-resilient':

Brooke (14 yrs): I don't really like Society and Environment because my teacher's heaps mean. She picks on me.

Int: What does she do?

Brooke: She picks on me and Anna because me and Anna are loud-mouths and she goes 'If you're ever late again you'll get withdrawal!' and all this and I go 'O.K. then!'

Tony (12 years) who is 'non-resilient' and not doing well at school says his teacher '... picks on you and she doesn't ever help me. She helps all the girls and they're doing good at school.' Prue (16 years) is 'non-resilient' and 'hates all the teachers' because she appears to have inherited her brother's bad reputation '... they pick on me because of my brother. When I first went to the school they said 'Oh, your John's sister aren't you' and then I got in trouble'.

'Respectfulness' is a quality that both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students really appreciate in their teachers. Sally (14 years) is 'non-resilient' and gets on well with several teachers because: 'They don't treat us like little kids. They treat us with more respect. But if we don't treat them with respect, they won't treat us with respect.' Dwayne (15 years) is 'non-resilient' and complains that many of his teachers don't treat him with respect and don't cut him any slack when he needs it:

Dwayne (15 yrs): Sometimes when I've got sport on the weekend I can't get a thing finished. Some teachers will say 'Fine, that's alright' and give me an extension of a few days. Others will say 'Nuh. You've only got the weekend to do it.'

Friendliness and kindness are valued qualities in teachers by both 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students alike. Ricky (15 years) is 'non-resilient' and claims his P.E. teacher is the '.. most kindest teacher I've ever known' because, among other kindnesses, he bought him a diary when his

money for a new one was stolen. Molly (14 years) is 'resilient' and loves her Drama teacher:

Molly (14 yrs): Miss Dyer, my Drama teacher she's heaps cool. She's really – oh, I just love her. She's like a full confidence boost. If you're sad she'll come up to you and be all stupid and make you smile again. You just walk out of her class really happy.

Competence is not something that either 'resilient' or 'non-resilient' students take for granted in their teachers. Respondents from both groups talk in positive terms about teachers who 'know their stuff', who can make subjects interesting and who can control a class. They also provide lots of examples of teachers who appear ignorant, dull, lazy or unable to manage difficult students without yelling and 'stressing'. Paul (14 years) is 'non-resilient' and explains about teachers who 'stress':

Paul (14 yrs): Some teachers are helpful and some are NOT.
Int: Some not so much?
Paul: Yeah, Mr Chiltern he's a stress head. Every time we get in class and people aren't sitting down and all that, they're sitting on tables, Mr. Chiltern has one big stress that looks like a tomato popped his brain all over his face. Have a heart attack why don't you!

Sally (14 years), classified as 'non-resilient', explains what she believes to be an indicator of teacher 'slackness' or incompetence:

Sally (14 yrs): Oh well some of the teachers here are really slack. One of them asked me to hand up my thing and I've already handed it up and like months ago! And he's like 'When are you going to hand it up?' and I'm like 'I already have!'. It's the second time he's lost our work.

Eddie (15 years) is 'resilient' and continues the theme also explaining the necessity for good control:

Eddie (15 yrs): Good teachers are nice and like they don't have stresses every 5 seconds about the littlest things. Bad teachers are not controlling the class and like someone could just get hurt – like what happened the other day.

Danni (14 years) is 'resilient' and just one of many students from her school who talks at length about a particular teacher whom they all consider to be nice but incompetent:

Danni (15 yrs): This teacher Mr Sparrow, he's had 4 breakdowns or something, and he's heaps stupid. Like he's heaps nice but he's just annoying. He will go to his class and he'll keep writing on the board. He doesn't even talk to us at all

Int: What does he teach
Danni: Science and Maths. You just walk into his class and sit down and he's just like, 'Hello everybody. I've got a new joke today.' And then he'll tell us a joke and then keep writing. And we're like, what is he writing? You can't even understand his writing. So we just talk and muck around and then he'll just give us an A or a B for nothing. And then I'll go home and Mum will go, 'Good you got a B for Science.' And I'll be like, 'But I didn't work for it though.' So sometimes I think, what's it going to be like when he leaves and what teacher will I get for Science, because like, he's not going to be here next year and I'll be in year 10 and have a different Science teacher and I'll be like, Aagghh! Aagghh!

All participants are very perceptive about what makes a 'good' or 'helpful' teacher. It is again of concern though, that 'non-resilient' respondents tend to draw their conclusions from bad experiences. There are two ways of explaining this that are immediately apparent. The first is that the low self esteem of 'non-resilient' students may lead them to construct their experiences in negative terms. In support of this view there does appear to be a 'victim-orientation' among many of the respondents quoted here – they are picked on, yelled at, done down by teachers - many students like Brooke (P. 59 above) simply do not see that their behaviour has a direct effect on how teachers treat them.

The second explanation may be that the teachers are in fact treating 'non-resilient' students differently and there are plenty of explanations for why that might be. A good deal of research suggests that teachers like to teach students who, like swotty Lachlan, are high rather than low-achievers (Brophy 1985). 'Non-resilient' students, because of their low self esteem and victim-orientation can also set up teacher expectations which can then turn into self-fulfilling prophecies (Good and Brophy 1994; Barry and King 1993). In other words, teachers develop expectations and beliefs about students' capacities based on such things as their behaviour, appearance and current achievement levels. This translates into teachers' attitudes towards and treatment of these students (e.g. less encouragement or challenge; greater willingness to accept sub-standard work). Students 'read' these signs and conform to the image of themselves that is being communicated to them.

Schools need to ensure that high expectations are held for all students, irrespective of their scholastic record, social class status and/or their personal behaviour. Teachers need to be made strongly aware of how students' presenting behaviours can surreptitiously influence teachers' personal judgements and expectations. In addition, teachers need to have strategies for dealing with and challenging 'non-resilient' students' victim-orientation.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- future-orientation; realistic plans for the future
- autonomy; self efficacy; ability to assume control of one's life
- self esteem
- achievement, mastery and competence
- literacy skills

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- challenge the low career aspirations of non-resilient students
- special literacy programs for those students whose skills are not adequate for success in secondary school
- effective career information, work experience and vocational education for all students
- improve self esteem through explicit teaching for achievement, mastery, competence
- schools need to 'sell' non-traditional subjects better to non-resilient students
- schools recognize the importance of the school as a centre for socialising for young adolescents
- re-focus teachers on effective behaviour management policies; the effects of non-resilient characteristics on teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies.

CHAPTER 10 DATA ANALYSIS

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER KIDS ABOUT LIFE?

Most participants had an answer to this question, even if it was to say that they never gave advice to anyone about anything! The difference between the 'resilient' and the 'non-resilient' students' responses were that the thoughts of those identified as 'resilient' frequently referred to future success and were expressed in proactive terms that invoked ambition, hard-work, persistence and taking advantage of opportunities. The advice offered by those students identified as 'non-resilient' was much more frequently expressed in present-day and reactive terms that stressed the avoidance of trouble and unnecessary risk-taking.

Of the 33 useful responses to this question from 'resilient' students, more than half (18) emphasised goal-setting, achievement-orientation and effort. There were no discernible differences here between boys and girls or between participants from rural and urban locations. Much of the advice proffered, we suspect, was based on parents' and teachers' exhortations (and possibly sports advertising) – certainly, the language seems familiar. Lesley (14 years), for example says: 'If you want to do something, just don't quit.' Eddie (15 years) who wants to be a carpenter says:

Eddie (15 yrs): If you want to succeed, continue with it and actually try and be good at what you want to do and stuff. If you want to succeed in a profession and stuff, just really try hard to do it .

Rosie (15 years) is even more insistent in her advice:

Rosie (15 yrs): Make sure you're determined to do something. Sort out what you're going to do now and try and achieve that goal. Make sure you're doing what stuff you need to do to get in a position if you want to be a certain career person. Figure out what you're doing and just work on it. That's about it. And try not to let people who harass you get in the way.

Michelle (16 years) maintains the theme but also emphasises 'enjoyment':

Michelle (16 yrs): Don't knock back good opportunities that come towards you. If you're offered things, take them while you can because they might not come around again. And try your hardest. Not that I always do, but I'd tell them to. Try and do things you enjoy, otherwise there's not any point in doing them because you just don't want to keep doing something you're unhappy with doing.

The bulk of responses from 'resilient' students were along the lines illustrated above. A few responses emphasised strategies for managing friendships and family relationships and two advised avoidance of drugs and alcohol.

Of the 31 responses from 'non-resilient' participants, about a third (11) declined to give advice to other kids about life. As Ben (15 years) says: 'I don't really think to the future.' Those ideas that were proffered were more negative, tentative, or hedged than those offered by 'resilient' students. The most negative response comes from Gillian (15 years) who says the advice she'd give other kids about life is 'It sucks!'.

Others are less negative, but cautious. Leanne (16 years), for example, says:

Leanne (16 yrs):	Try your hardest but don't try too hard.
Int:	Why not try too hard?
Leanne:	Because you'll stuff it up.

Karl (15 years) says: 'Keep your life clean and your reputation and all that. Just stay out of trouble and get through school.'

Other advice from participants identified as 'non-resilient' is frequently about avoiding troubled relationships. Gina (14 years), for example, has cause to be wary about friendships. Her advice is: 'Don't get in with the wrong crowd even though they'll make out that they're your friends they can turn on you real quick.' In relation to friends, Hamish (14 years) advises: 'Stay nice at first but just act normal after a while once they get to know you and stuff.' Sally (14 years) focuses on creating harmonious family relationships

Sally (14 yrs):	If they're always arguing with their parents, try not to answer back, help around the house and get in their good books and treat them with respect and then they will do the same.
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Only two responses bore any resemblance to those of the 'resilient' participants. Ricky (15 years) says: 'Just take the chance when it comes to you.' And Simon (15 years) says 'Just try hard for what you want'.

The difference in responses between the two groups is marked and of concern. The 'resilient' students' advice is shaped not only by what one might call the Nike philosophy - 'Just Do It!' - but also by the confident belief that they can do it. In their talk we find evidence of achievement motivation, hope, future-orientation, ambition, goal-setting, persistence, effort, confidence and self efficacy all in relation to future success. On the other hand, the 'non-resilient' participants' advice focuses more on avoiding troubled relationships and personal failure.

In many ways, this data set provides a summary and an overview of all the protective factors and processes identified thus far. To face the future confidently and with hope, young people need to believe they are

competent and capable; they need to have experienced success; they need well-established self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy. Successful relationships with others - particularly with a caring adult - help provide the base from which to look confidently into an unknown future. The 'resilient' students' advice to others reflects their ability to access and draw on combinations of the protective factors and processes that have been identified throughout this study. 'Non-resilient' students, on the other hand, have little sense of self-efficacy or autonomy - little belief in their ability to take control of life events and influence outcomes. Their reactive, self-protective advice to others reflects an expectation of failure or, at best, limited success from very modest goals.

Clearly, the 'non-resilient' students' orientation is learned and can be changed. Families, schools and communities all need to provide or strengthen the protective factors and processes over which they have some influence in order to challenge reactive thinking and to develop in all students the belief that they have a worthwhile future and considerable control over the shape it takes.

Protective Factors and Processes illustrated by the data:

- future-orientation and hope
- autonomy; self efficacy; ability to assume control of one's life
- self esteem
- achievement, mastery and competence
- persistence, effort, goal-setting
- supportive relationships and connectedness

Indications for Prevention and Intervention:

- challenge reactive thinking of 'non-resilient' students
- effective career information, work experience and vocational education for all students
- improve self esteem through explicit teaching for achievement, mastery, competence
- explicit teaching of success strategies such as goal-setting, persistence, effort and practice
- provision of recreational opportunities to learn skills and develop supportive relationships with caring adults
- encouragement of risk-taking
- provision of opportunities for leadership and service to others

CHAPTER 11 DISCUSSION

Introduction

Young adolescents identified as being 'at risk' are many times more likely than those not so identified to develop antisocial behaviours, to abuse alcohol and drugs, to experience unwanted teen pregnancy, to drop out of school and to be both the perpetrators and the victims of personal violence (Rutter 1980; Dryfoos 1990; Hawkins et al. 1992). These facts are not new and the indicators of risk have changed very little over the last few decades (see West and Farrington 1973; West 1982). What is new is the concept of 'resilience' and its utility in understanding how 'risk' may be minimised or avoided. By studying the lives of young people 'at risk' who avoid the outcomes listed above, we get a much clearer picture of those *protective factors* and *protective processes* that operate to keep young people safe and on track.

In the present study we have shown how protective factors and processes operate in the lives of young people identified as being 'at risk'. These protective factors and processes may be located within the young person (e.g. learned attitudes, beliefs); they may be found in the family context (e.g. caring adults); the school and the community can also be sources of protective factors and processes (e.g. schools that teach for mastery, local Councils that provide recreational facilities and opportunities for young people to socialise etc.). There is no one combination of protective factors and processes that can be identified as better than any other – 'resilient' young people will draw on those that are available. What we do know is 'the more the better' - the more protective factors and processes that the young person can mobilise, the more likely they are to display resilient behaviour and of course, the reverse is true too – the fewer the protective factors and processes, the more likely the young person will display non-resilient behaviour. The task, clearly, is to ensure that all young people have access to as many protective factors and learn as many protective processes as possible.

Principles of successful intervention programs

There is ample evidence that interventions that emphasise 'youth development' rather than those that focus narrowly on problem-prevention (e.g. anti-drug programs) are far more likely to produce positive, resilient behaviour in 'at risk' young people. Thus, programs designed specifically to prevent juvenile delinquency are less likely to be effective than programs that take a holistic approach to developing skills and strengths in young people.

A number of recent rigorous evaluations of interventionist anti-drugs, anti-teen pregnancy and anti-violence programs in the USA, clearly show what works and what doesn't (see Kirby 1994, 1999; Dusenbury and Falco 1995; Dusenbury, Falco and Lake 1997; Dusenbury et al 1997). The Big

Brothers/Big Sisters program, for example, has been shown to be an excellent example of a successful intervention that focuses on youth development. This program involves long-term mentorship whereby young people 'at risk' are paired with an adult mentor. Mentors must commit themselves to a minimum 3 year period and at least 3 hours per week of interaction with their designated partner. There is no direct teaching of any kind – the purpose of the relationship is to provide 'connectedness' or a sense that there is at least one person who is committed to the young person. After a rigorous evaluation, this program was judged to be highly effective because the young people involved scored low on all the risk factors being measured such as teen pregnancy, school drop-out rate, substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and so on.

Evaluations of successful programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters indicate that a positive youth development approach to intervention involves a number of key general principles:

- The recognition of young people as resources to be developed rather than problems to be fixed
- The active involvement of young people
- The development of life-skills rather than problem-prevention skills

In practical terms, successful youth development programs:

- have strong theoretical frameworks
- have adults who care and are willing to spend time with young people
- provide opportunities for young people to make a contribution to others
- teach skills and competencies
- develop a sense of connectedness to others
- use long-term rather than short-term strategies
- respect the strength of communities (i.e. focus on potential human resources not on weaknesses)

Interventions suggested by the present research

If we adopt Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to conceptualise young people's lives and those factors that can influence their development, then it is clear that interventions at the level of any one of the nested systems he proposes can have a direct influence on a young person's development.

Interventions at *macrosystem* level – the level of values, attitudes, principles, ideologies – are difficult to implement in a deliberate way, although significant changes in values and attitudes can be effected through vigorous public debate, public awareness campaigns and the like. The belief that young people are a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be fixed is a change at macrosystem level that could be

deliberately encouraged through these means and would have a powerful effect on the lives of young people. Such a change in society's perception of adolescents would lead to a productive focus on youth development rather than the more commonplace emphasis on problem-prevention which, as has been indicated above, is rarely very effective in producing lasting reduction of risky behaviours in young people.

At the level of the *exosystem*, we encounter institutions that enact the values and principles of the *macrosystem* (e.g. government agencies that implement social and other policies; the legal system). In addition, there are other sites, like parents' workplaces that can also exert an influence on young people although they do not actually frequent these sites. Employment that forces parents to move around, for example, or be absent from home a great deal or work family-unfriendly hours clearly has the capacity to reduce parent-child contact, connectedness and supervision, all of which are factors associated with resilience in young people.

It is important for policy makers and others in positions of *exosystem* influence to take notice of the growing body of knowledge generated by research in the field of youth development. As indicated above, studies that have evaluated intervention programs for young people 'at risk', suggest that policies implementing a long-term youth development approach rather than a short-term problem-prevention one produce young people who stay at school, avoid unwanted pregnancies, resist abuse of drugs and/or alcohol and do not engage in violent and/or criminal activities. In other words, a youth development approach is most likely to develop resilient behaviour in young people.

The benefit of research like the present study, is that it explores what is happening at *microsystem* and *mesosystem* levels in young people's lives. The *microsystem* represents all those sites in which young people are physically located - the home/family, the school, the local community. Things that happen in these sites obviously have a direct influence on a young person's development. The *mesosystem* represents links between these sites and, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the more links there are between these sites, the better it is for the development of the young person concerned.

Throughout the analysis in the previous chapters, summaries of youth-development-type interventions to help develop resilience in 'at risk' young people were suggested where appropriate. What follows is a comprehensive summary of all these suggested interventions, gathered together under the headings of all the *microsystem* sites listed above. This division is, of course, somewhat arbitrary as many interventions could be subsumed under more than one heading and many interventions are deeply and intricately linked.

Home/Family

Perhaps the most pervasive theme that arises through the contrast between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' participants' responses on most questions was that concerning **autonomy** and a sense of **personal agency**. Young people displaying 'resilient' behaviour were far more likely to talk in ways that indicated they believed they could control their lives and what happened to them. They did not see themselves as victims of fate or circumstance; they did not accept personal weaknesses and faults as unchangeable givens that would prevent them from being successful in the future.

Psychological theory variously explains this phenomenon in terms of *attribution theory* or *locus of control theory* both of which are subsumed under the more general *self concept theory*. Learning from observing how others behave is also implicated here and is explained by *social learning theory*. In any event, one's sense of personal agency and autonomy is learned, largely from what others say to you, from observations of how others respond to life's events and from conclusions you draw from your attempts to act autonomously.

Clearly everyone who comes in contact with young people in any substantial way can influence outcomes in this regard.

- Everyone, but especially family members, needs to be able to recognise and challenge self-defeating talk and learned helplessness in young people.
- Family chores and tasks, that are within the young person's competence, should be required and genuine praise for effort and success (however small) should be the consequence.
- Adults and older siblings can consciously model problem-solving behaviour. That is, they can think out loud when faced with problems showing, for example, how alternative solutions can be generated; how the pros and cons of each possible solution can be weighed up; how different outcomes will demand different courses of personal action.
- In the safe environment of the family, young people should be encouraged to take risks that will develop personal competencies, skills and a sense of independence.

'Resilient' young people in this study often talked about taking care of others or of being responsible for, usually younger, siblings. This capacity for **nurturance** is a well-established protective factor (e.g. Werner and Smith 1988). Pets will do if young brothers and sisters aren't available.

- Both boys and girls should be shown how to care for younger siblings in a practical way (feeding, bathing etc) and given the opportunity to demonstrate responsibility in increasingly significant ways (e.g. walking younger siblings to school; baby-sitting).
- Boys and girls will benefit from the care and responsibility involved in having a pet.

- Having chores and tasks that are performed for the good of all family members (e.g. doing the dishes, preparing school lunches) helps develop a sense of nurturance.
- Celebrating special family occasions (e.g. birthdays) are also important ways of teaching how to think of and care for others.

Connectedness to at least one adult whose unconditional positive regard can be relied upon is a vital ingredient in the development of resilient behaviour. This person need not be a family member but the respondents' attachment to parents in particular suggests that this is desirable if it is possible. Family members need to be aware that 'connectedness' involves:

- Spending time with the young person; taking an interest in their activities and being proud of their achievements.
- Demonstrating that they care about them by, for example, setting reasonable rules and demanding certain standards of behaviour.
- Being receptive when they wish to talk about problems.
- Encouraging and supporting them in their activities at school and outside the home.

Family intactness was no guarantee of resilient behaviour in young people in this study. Nevertheless, attachment to parents (no matter how neglectful or abusive they appeared to be) and the palpable sense of loss expressed by many respondents who were separated from one or both parents, suggests that wherever possible it is important to help families deal with their problems before they get to the point of no return. There are already a number of programs run by government and private social welfare agencies that attempt to help families resolve differences or cope during periods of severe stress. **More and better-targeted intervention programs** designed to offer a variety of forms of assistance at the first indications of family distress and which operate on a 'family-development' model (like the 'youth development' model being recommended by this study) are likely to be more successful in helping families stay together.

School

Young people spend a good deal of their time in school and many protective factors and processes can be embedded within schools' routine practices and programs.

A major difference between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' participants in this study lay in the way those who were classified as 'resilient' talked, often with pride, about **personal achievements and accomplishments**.

Self concept theory emphasises how important a sense of self worth is in the development of functional individuals and how this self esteem can only be built on real achievements. Seligman (1995), in particular, warns us that 'feeling good' about ourselves can only be predicated on 'doing well'; thus, if we give students the opportunity to achieve, develop

competencies and master skills in a wide range of areas (i.e. 'do well'), then 'feeling good' (i.e. self esteem) will automatically follow.

What individuals judge as 'achievement' is of course, relative. A young person may know that they are less competent than their classmates in, say, reading skills. However, if that student is involved in a structured program that is gradually but perceptibly developing these skills, then a sense of achievement can be developed. Another student may be a poor academic performer but value their achievements in sport or practical vocational skills.

While it might be thought that teaching for achievement and mastery was the core business of schools, some recent research (Howard and Johnson 2000) suggests that for some (primary) schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas, these aims have slipped somewhat down the list of priorities. Too often, teachers are forced to abandon their central focus on teaching and learning because many troubled students present with social or behavioural problems that absorb available time and energy.

There are a number of ways in which schools can re-focus on the goal of helping students achieve mastery and competence:

- Schools need to re-focus on the goals of teaching for achievement, mastery and competence for all students.
- The range of ways in which students can demonstrate achievement beyond the traditional academic and sporting ones needs to be expanded. Achievements in art, drama, music, vocational education, work experience, leadership, social skills and so on, all need to be publicly recognised and valued.
- Mastery of appropriate literacy skills is essential for most students' sense of self worth and for their ability to progress successfully through secondary school. Schools should not assume that students come up to the high school with literacy skills at an appropriate level, nor should they assume that different subject teachers have the special skills necessary to teach remedial literacy. Special programs to facilitate achievement in these areas are required.
- Criterion-based assessment practices should be utilised more extensively in order to provide low-achievers with a genuine sense of progress and achievement.
- Many 'at risk' students are not academically oriented but rather are firmly focused on the world of work beyond school. Vocational education and work experience programs that are rigorous and well-structured can provide students with a real sense of achievement and a future orientation.
- Teachers need to be careful to hold high expectations for all students and not allow the presenting behaviours of some 'at risk' students (e.g. low self esteem, victim orientation) to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.

- All students need to learn the relationship between achievement and good study strategies. They should be taught explicitly how to study and the specific values of goal-setting, effort and practice in relation to mastery need to be emphasised.
- Schools should support organized sporting and non-sporting clubs and associations on school premises and during school time. Many of these (e.g. army cadets, computer clubs) enable young people to develop skills and competencies that are beyond the range possible in most school subjects.

A sense of belonging and **connectedness** to the school is a powerful protective factor found in the literature (e.g. Rutter et al 1979; Rutter 1984) and schools can engage in specific practices that will help develop this sense of belonging. In addition, members of staff can provide opportunities for connectedness with a caring adult either in addition to or as substitutes for family members.

- Teachers are well placed to act as the significant, caring adult in a young person's life. In each school in this study, the same teachers' names cropped up time and time again as people the respondents valued and respected; people they felt took an interest in them; people with whom they felt comfortable talking about problems. Teachers need to be prepared to undertake this important role when necessary.
- Schools should have access to extensive resources to serve the personal, social and counselling needs of difficult or troubled students. Many 'at risk' young people have complex needs that are beyond the expertise of ordinary teachers and without specialised help they are unlikely to feel a sense of connectedness to the school. In addition, their troublesome behaviour may make it difficult for other students to experience a sense of connectedness to school and teachers.
- It is important for schools to realise how important young people's social needs are especially in Years 8 and 9. Learning how to make and keep friends – to become connected to peers - is a major preoccupation during these years and the school needs to support young people in this task. Again, school-based clubs and associations that support organized sporting and non-sporting activities are important in this regard. Not only do they provide opportunities for connecting with competent caring adults, they also provide plenty of opportunities for learning and practising social skills. More 'resilient' than 'non-resilient' students report being involved in groups of this kind but few groups were associated with the students' schools.
- School-based clubs and associations that provide opportunity for leadership and service are good ways of encouraging nurturance, responsibility and connectedness to others.

In relation to developing **autonomy** and a sense of **personal agency** in young people, schools also have an important role to play.

- Like family members, teachers have an important role to play in both challenging defeatist talk and learned helplessness in students and in

modelling problem-solving behaviour. In their feedback to students, teachers must take care to attribute failure to such things as lack of effort or poor preparation (things within a student's control) rather than lack of ability (things beyond a student's control).

- The role that schools can play in promoting achievement, mastery and competence is a vital one in the development of self efficacy. When young people have had the experience of successfully mastering particular skills and when they believe that they are competent, they also have sufficient confidence to 'have a go' at other things; to have sufficient ego strength to risk failure in new ventures. Experiences of success give young people the confidence to take control of their lives.
- Many students need to learn that learning is something under their own, not the teacher's control. Teachers in all subjects need to teach explicitly the importance of goal-setting, effort and practice in mastering skills and material.
- Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is a smooth transition from primary school to high school and that this transition is conceptualised as an achievable and exciting challenge rather than a formidable hurdle. Successful transition should represent a *rite de passage*, a maturity bench-mark for young adolescents, not a lucky escape from a highly risky situation.
- The resilient students in this study had powers of self-reflection, the ability to hypothesise and plan juggling a range of possibilities. These are higher-order thinking skills that can be developed through any school subjects be they traditional academic ones or vocationally-oriented ones.
- Young people need to be taught how to take control of conflict situations in socially acceptable ways. Behaviour management policies should reinforce the conflict resolution skills that are explicitly taught.

All young people need a **future-orientation** – at the very least, a sense that there is a future to look forward to. The 'resilient' respondents generally had very positive views and definite plans about their futures. The 'non-resilient' participants, on the other hand, talked about the future with less eager anticipation, with more apprehension and they had fewer and humbler ambitions. All students had absorbed the rhetoric about the importance of work and 'getting a good job' but the differences in career aspirations between the 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' students were markedly different and not necessarily a reflection of their academic records.

- Vocational and career advice provided by schools needs to be comprehensive, up-to-date and it should provide a range of challenging (but achievable) options for all students. Careers advisers, like classroom teachers, need to ensure that the presenting behaviours of 'non-resilient' students do not influence their judgements about appropriate career choices (i.e. creating self-fulfilling prophecies).
- The narrow work-oriented view that many 'non-resilient' students have towards their education means that schools need to 'sell' subjects

that students do not see as obviously relevant to future work. Subjects like Drama, Society and Environment, Science have intrinsic value for all students but may need to be 'sold' in different kinds of ways if they are to engage all students effectively.

Community

Community audits in the target areas were beyond the scope of this study, so it is not clear what facilities and services are actually available to young people in these locations. Suffice to say, that with the exception of sports teams and associations in the country towns, very few respondents appear to use community resources or be involved with local organizations of any kind. This suggests that either there are very few available or that those in existence are unattractive to young people

Of course the local community has a role to play in developing youth – in helping to create 'resilient' young people. The community should be a source of caring adults; of opportunities for leadership and service; of places where young people can safely socialise; of organizations that can teach new and interesting skills. The reality, however, often falls far short of this. Young people congregate *en masse* in shopping centres or use public spaces to practice their skate-boarding and thus make local people fearful and inclined to the view that the young are problems to be fixed rather than resources to be developed.

- Communities that are serious about youth development will develop a collaborative approach with local schools, families and young people in order to provide the kinds of support that will be valued and used.
- In general, local communities need to support (either alone or in partnership with businesses, schools, social or local government agencies) a range of organized sporting and non-sporting clubs and associations for young people. The types of clubs provided will depend on such local factors as, for example, the expertise of local people willing to help run them; the preferences of the young people and the willingness of community groups to provide equipment, space and so on. In general though, these organizations will:
 - put young people in contact with caring adults
 - teach useful skills and competencies
 - provide opportunities for socialising
 - encourage young people to use their skills for the benefit of others
 - allow young people to develop leadership skills.
- Given the popularity of bike-riding among young males in this study, local Councils could look for ways to provide suitable areas (preferably with rugged terrain) for bike-riders to practise their skills.
- Given the popularity of 'talking with friends' as a pastime among young females in this study, local Councils or shopping centres could look for ways of providing safe and comfortable public spaces for young people to meet, talk, play music and so on.

- Community service organizations (e.g. St. Johns, the CFS, the SES) and activist organizations (e.g. Amnesty, Greenpeace, Landcare, WWF) should be encouraged to develop and actively recruit young people into youth chapters or cadet groups.
- Being involved with organized sport was a major feature of the 'resilient' participants' lives. Chatham, the small country town, had a high success rate here because as one student explained, you don't have to be a star to be involved in country sport – everyone gets a guernsey. City communities need to give some thought to ways in which they can likewise involve everyone who wants to play (not just the star players) in organized sporting activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study recommends a youth development rather than a problem-prevention approach when working with students identified as being 'at risk'. While the lives of individual young people can be affected by changes at *macro* and *exosystem* levels, these changes are hard to organize and take a long time to occur. Effective interventions can happen much more quickly and easily at the *microsystem* level. Here, interventions can be developed 'from the ground up' and be tailored to suit the needs and to use the resources available in the local community.

By making youth development a local community issue, it's not only the young who will benefit. The need to forge links between *microsystem* settings (creating what Bronfenbrenner calls the *mesosystem*) will require community organizations and businesses to collaborate and communicate with each other for the 'common good'. In this way, community development will be a valuable side-benefit from an effective strategy aimed at youth.

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APPENDIX

Identifying 'at-risk' adolescents who are either displaying 'resilience' or 'non-resilience'

