

# Informal Mentors: An Important Resource for Young People

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# The First Study

- Kauai Longitudinal Study (Werner and colleagues)
  - Longitudinal cohort study (1955)
  - Monitored the impact of risk and protective factors on the development of these individuals
  - 1/3 were at risk (vulnerable)
    - 1/3 of the vulnerable group overcame the odds— why?



# VIPs: Very Important Non-Parental Adults

*Many people of your age have an important adult in their lives-someone who is not their parent. This person might be a relative such as an aunt or a grandparent, or a teacher, a coach, or counselor. Think of such persons in your life-adults (at least 19 years old) who have had a significant influence on you, or whom you feel you can count on in times of need. Do you have any important adults in your life?*

# Important Non-parental Adults: Initial Studies

- Key Findings:
  - Normative
  - High quality
  - Kin versus non-kin
  - Levels of importance
  - Protective factor



Greenberger, et al.(1998); Beam et al, 2002, Chang et al, (in press)

# Foster Care Youth

- High proportion have VIPs- 86%
- Their behaviour
  - Positive health behaviours of VIPs was associated with lower health-compromising behaviours of older foster care youth
    - Not true for parents



# What they said about their VIPs...

- “I need her financially, mentally, and physically, I would be at a total loss without her, I love her. I feel like a complete fool without my grandmother. I love her....she has good input, good advice ... we get closer and closer as I open up to her she understands me even more
  - Helps out across many different areas

- “I know I wouldn’t be alive if it hadn’t been for her”
  - Even “bad” VIPs serve a function
- Older foster care youth go home



# Youth Offenders

- Youth Offenders have VIPs too...
- Kin VIPs go away
- Non-kin VIPs become closer
- How can we engage these VIPs?



# VIPs in NZ

- Participants were 313 young adolescents (50% female) enrolled at an intermediate school in a low-income area in Auckland, New Zealand.
- The youth were 11-13 year olds ( $M = 11.96$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) and the majority (85%) had been born in New Zealand.
- The ethnic make-up of the sample, reflecting the diversity of the area, was 30% Māori, 30% Pakeha, 23% Pasifika (12% Samoan, 5% Cook Island, 3% Tongan, 4% other Pacific), 7% East/Southeast Asian, 7% Indian, and 3% other.
- 84% had a VIP in the 1st study; 62% had a VIP in the 2<sup>nd</sup> study

# What we looked at...

- Many of the youth are at-risk for academic problems
  - Disengagement from school; poor performance
- How can VIPs help young people be successful at school?

Relationship of VIP to youth	Percentage
Grandparent	32.6
Aunt/Uncle	27.1
Sibling	14.9
Cousin	3.9
Older friend	4.4
Parent's friend/Family friend	4.4
Teacher	2.2
Coach	2.2
Parent's significant other	1.1
Religious representative	1.1
Neighbour	1.1
Counsellor	.6
Friend's parent/Friend's other relative	.6
Other	3.9

# Specific Ways They Have been Important

General support <i>e.g. "she is so kind, she understands me", "they help me"</i>	49%	Role-model <i>e.g. "role model"</i>	3%
Parental care <i>e.g. "he looked after me everyday", "he's like my dad"</i>	11%	Fun, companionship <i>e.g. "fun babysitter, is fun bubbly person"</i>	3%
Intimacy, self-disclosure <i>e.g. "I can talk to her", "she understands me and listens"</i>	9%	Support for activities/interests/non-school skills <i>e.g. "basketball training advice"</i>	2%
Support for personal development/issues/problems <i>e.g. "helped me through life"</i>	5%	Support for interpersonal problems/issues/relationships <i>e.g. "she's there for me when I get into arguments with friends or parents"</i>	2%
Financial <i>e.g., "buying stuff"</i>	5%	Other <i>e.g. "she's my nana"</i>	9%
Support/motivation for schoolwork <i>e.g. "helping me with homework"</i>	3%		

# VIPs and Academic Achievement

- PAT, STAR, asTTle
- Associations with having a VIP
  - Not how many
- Strong associations with the *quality* of the VIP relationship, not VIP level of education
- When VIPs were present, the effects of parents and peers went away, regardless of ethnicity and parent level of education

# The Take-Home Message

- Many youth have VIPs- mentors need to consider how important they are to young people and how to engage them
  - Even if we would not choose them
- Many youth do not have a VIP- mentoring programmes need to fill this gap