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Implementing the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme in a New Zealand secondary
school: The experiences of staff and Year 9 students

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Dedication

I would like to thank my wife Chrissy and my children for their support during this testing time. Because of their understanding I have been able to overcome the various challenges I have encountered. I also want to thank my mother for giving me undivided support in my childhood and giving me the guidance I needed to become resilient in such a challenging world. I also would like to dedicate this thesis to the youth of New Zealand, especially those who are struggling with issues they are finding difficult to conquer. Hopefully, this thesis can contribute to supportive treatment and prevention programmes to help our youth become resilient adults.

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Abstract

Increasing rates of young people's anxiety and depression is a concern for New Zealand secondary schools and this results in issues for students such as decreased wellbeing and school attendance, health difficulties and social isolation. In 2013 the Ministry of Education introduced a pilot of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme into secondary schools for students in Year 9. This thesis reports on the experiences of teachers and students of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme in one secondary school context. This programme is based on cognitive behavioural therapy principles and has been developed to support young people build their understanding and skills in resilience to enhance their wellbeing. The programme has been implemented and evaluated with young people in a number of countries. Research has shown it to have beneficial effects in promoting emotional resilience and in reducing anxiety and depression in students. The findings of this school case study are explored, and the impact of the programme for the students and their school community is presented. A case study methodological approach was used that enabled the collection of rich data to explore the deep meaning from teachers and students. This involved an in-depth instrumental case study within one secondary school involving teachers, students, the counsellor, the principal and students' parents. Observations, document analysis and interviews took place to build a comprehensive understanding of how teachers and students learned through the programme. Findings suggest the students see the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme as a positive, useful programme that has enabled them to learn various strategies to deal with challenging scenarios in their life. The findings also address barriers to implementation and possible implications for the future. Several suggestions for the programme are discussed along with certain adaptations of the programme to make it more relevant to the New Zealand context.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Young people are increasingly being diagnosed with various mental health issues which affects their learning and wellbeing (King & Bernstein, 2001). When experiencing mental health difficulties, student attendance, and interest in hobbies and sports can decrease and relationships can break down. The New Zealand government has a particular imperative to support young people with mental health issues because of the high prevalence. For example, New Zealand has the second highest suicide rate for 15–24 year olds, (males and females) in OECD countries (North and South, July 2014). This can be attributed to a range of factors, but it is linked to a person's wellbeing, especially in relation to anxiety and depression (Snider, 2011; The Nemours Foundation, 2003).

Anxiety is described as an “unpleasant feeling of fear or apprehension” (Davison & Neale, 1994, p.130) and can be exhibited in various anxiety disorders when these feelings are present. Barrett (2012b, p.3) describes Generalised Anxiety Disorder as being “characterised by excessive worry and fear about the future or past events. This disorder is usually accompanied by somatic symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, vomiting and sleep disturbances”. Barrett describes that various other main disorders include Separation Anxiety Disorder, Specific Phobia, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Agoraphobia, Social Phobia, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Panic Attacks. Ford and colleagues (2003) cited in McLoone, Hudson and Rapee (2006) explain that separation anxiety is more common in younger children, whereas generalised and social anxiety disorders are reported more in older children.

Neil and Christensen (2009, p. 209) state that “anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school age children and adolescents” and note that it is often unidentified and therefore goes untreated. McClone, Hudson and Rapee (2006) state that anxiety affects about 10% of children and adolescents and that it can have many related issues. These can include difficulties with attention and concentration, social interactions, poor self-esteem, establishing relationships with peers and can also lead to depression. Statistics show that about 33% of females will

develop an anxiety disorder in their life, with males being around 22% (McClean, Asnaani & Hofman, 2011, cited in Barrett, 2012b).

Another common disorder linked to wellbeing is depression which is defined as “an emotional state marked by great sadness and apprehension, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, withdrawal from others, loss of sleep, appetite, and sexual desire, or loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities” (Neale, 1994, p. 225). The effects are detrimental to an individual in many ways such as poor attention, memory and the ability to concentrate. Individuals can become withdrawn, lose pride in their appearance and lose hope and interest in things that were important to them (Neale, 1994). As people get older, there can be differences in the recognisable signs as children can show signs of aggression and being more active than usual, whereas adolescents tend to be pessimistic, antisocial and feel that others do not understand them (Barrett, 2012b).

Furthermore, Barrett (2012b) states that depression can be seen as secondary to anxiety and that those who experience both are usually older than those who experience only one disorder. Adolescents and adults can develop depression if their anxiety went untreated when they were children as this is seen as the biggest risk factor for depression, which indicates the importance of early intervention programmes. Early intervention programmes help prevent anxiety and depression by increasing resilience and coping skills (Barrett, 2012b).

Furthermore, individuals who are lacking resilience are often unable to cope when they have difficulties that come their way so it is vital that they are equipped the best they can when they encounter challenges to their wellbeing. Importantly, students need to have the skills to navigate and negotiate their way towards the right path as seen here:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways (Unger, 2008, cited in Unger, 2015, p.10).

Related to this are wellbeing programmes that focus on preventative interventions, which are developed for use in certain settings. These can be placed into three categories (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). Universal studies are seen to be

used with a whole class. Selective programmes are based on working with those who could be at risk as various factors could make them more prone to anxiety or depression. There are also targeted programmes for supporting students with known risk factors. Research has shown that these programmes in schools aimed at preventing anxiety have been successful and seen positive results (Neil & Christensen, 2009). These are mainly based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) programmes and include Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS), Confident Kids, Worrybusters, and Social Effectiveness Theory for Adolescents (Cullen, 2013).

CBT evolved from Bandura's Cognitive Social Learning theory which states that as humans think cognitively, their cognitions, behaviours and interactions with the environment are constantly interacting and this is what will most likely affect their future behaviour (Shaffer, 1994). Sykes (2009) states that CBT is around the idea that individuals are able to change their behaviour by being able to understand, restructure and recognise their own cognitions. CBT is seen as the most researched, effective way of dealing with mental health issues (Greig, 2007, cited in Sykes, 2009). Most CBT programmes have two main components: (1) cognitive restructuring and (2) graded exposure. These are both used with the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme which will now be discussed as it is the focus of this study.

During 2013–2015 the New Zealand Ministry of Education initiated a universal mental health programme, *MY FRIENDS Youth*, into secondary schools to support the wellbeing of young people in Year 9. This thesis explores this programme designed to support and facilitate wellbeing for students within one school context. While there are numerous programmes that aim to teach resiliency skills within secondary school settings, only a few teach specific strategies to help young people develop skills to cope with their anxiety and depression. It is important to explore programmes that support young people for several reasons. Research has shown that wellbeing is critical to a student's learning (Kashani & Orvaschel 1990).

MY FRIENDS Youth Programme

The *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme was developed in Australia by Dr. Paula Barrett. The rationale for the programme was to enable children with anxiety to be equipped with various techniques to cope (Davidson, 2011). The programme evolved from Kendall's (1994) Copy Cat treatment programme for anxiety and was adapted and enhanced by Barrett initially into the *FRIENDS for Children* and *FRIENDS for*

Youth programmes. The first evaluation of the programme was conducted in 2001 when the main aim of the programmes was to provide a CBT programme for childhood disorders. This has now been separated into three versions: *FRIENDS for Life* (7–12 years), *MY FRIENDS Youth Resilience* (12+) and *Fun FRIENDS* (4–7 years) with the latter being the latest addition (Friends for life.org.nz). This thesis focuses on the 12+ programme.

This is a programme that is used as a CBT intervention for youth in secondary school settings. This theoretical model is aimed at prevention and early intervention of depression and anxiety and addresses the processes of the mind (cognitive), body (physiological) and behaviour (learning) and how they interact in relation to anxiety (Barrett, 2012b). It is based on two particular approaches: the peer learning model and experiential learning. The former refers to the programme implemented in a natural setting with peers and allows participants to learn in a safe, fun environment. Experiential learning refers to how students should learn from their own experiences and builds on these to enhance their self-confidence (Barrett, 2012b).

MY FRIENDS Youth is a 10 session programme, with each letter of *FRIENDS* representing an aspect of the programme. These are F-Feelings, R-Remember to relax, I- Inner helpful thoughts, E- Explore solutions and coping step plans, N- Now reward yourself, D- Do it every day and S-Stay strong inside (Barrett, 2012a). The programme also has two booster sessions, which should be completed at four weeks and 12 weeks respectively after programme completion. Ideally there should also be two parent sessions, firstly when the programme starts and also half way through it (Barrett, 2012b). The programme covers a variety of topics including understanding and accepting differences, understanding feelings, understanding helpful and unhelpful thoughts, relaxation exercises, self-talk, coping plans, rewarding ourselves and problem solving. Students get a chance to practise these skills in a safe, fun environment and work through them in a particular order, which because of fidelity is one of the conditions of using the programme along with the need for the facilitator to attend a specialised one-day training programme. In New Zealand, educators attend a two-day training programme. Students must also use a specific programme-related student workbook (Barrett, 2012b).

The *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme has been implemented with young people in a number of countries after its introduction in Australia including New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Hong Kong, China, Norway, Finland, Portugal, Mexico,

Iceland, Japan, Canada, Holland, Ireland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. It is also in the process of being implemented in several other countries such as Brazil, Romania, Chile, Greece and Spain (Friends for life.org.nz). It continues to be researched internationally and many of these studies have shown it to have beneficial effects in promoting emotional resilience and in reducing anxiety and depression in students, (Davidson, 2011; Henefer & Rodgers, 2013; Liddle & Macmillan, 2010; Shortt, Barrett & Fox, 2001). However, as it is in the pilot phase in New Zealand it has only recently been fully evaluated here, with results showing that Year 9 students experience the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme positively in a New Zealand context (MacDonald, Bourke, Berg & Burgon, 2015).

MY FRIENDS Youth is facilitated by teachers in New Zealand with Year 9 classes, within the health and physical education (P.E) curriculum and has now been made available to over 50 schools with an initial trial of 10 schools commencing in 2013. This programme is part of the Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Package as one of a range of programmes to address mental health issues and integrated with the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Positive Behaviour For Learning (PB4L) initiative (MoE, 2015).

My research involved an independent study exploring the impact and influence of the programme on teachers and students within one school setting. This study aimed to provide valuable insights into Year 9 students and their views experiences of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme. This programme fits into the universal programme area, even though it can be run with smaller groups. I am a teacher in one of the three regional health schools, and as a teacher working in this area I believe it is critical to know what 'works' in supporting young people, and their teachers within a New Zealand context. I work with students who often suffer from mental health issues such as depression and anxiety and these students could benefit from the programme to help reduce their anxiety or depression and help increase their resilience. Findings from this research will add to the growing knowledge and evidence-base on whether and how the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme can support the wellbeing of all students, including those at-risk.

Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the various strategies and recent evidence-based pedagogical approaches for working with students to develop their resiliency from potential mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Specifically, the research aims to evaluate in-depth the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme within one school context. The research will explore what new ideas, initiatives and pedagogical practices have been employed through the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme in order to determine what works for young people and ways in which to utilise this information. The research questions are:

1. What skills, strategies and methods in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme do teachers observe the students use most and in what situations/contexts?
2. How do teachers adapt the programme to fit within the social and cultural context of a New Zealand school?
3. What skills, strategies and methods in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme do students find most useful for helping increase their resiliency and helping them cope with day-to-day challenges?

These questions are important for a number of reasons. As stated above, it has been demonstrated there is a strong link between student wellbeing and their success in education. Therefore, this research is important as it explores a potential programme to support the mental wellbeing of young people in their educational contexts. This also furthers the MoE's priorities in various ways. First, the MoE has invested significantly in the programme and it is therefore important to evaluate it. Second, this is an area of inclusive education which is an area of priority for the MoE. Inclusive education is a philosophy and practice that is designed to meet the student's needs in schools where every child's education needs are met using innovative, informed practices to enable the school to adapt to the student rather than the reverse (MoE, 2015).

This study is relevant to inclusive education as the median age of adolescents developing an anxiety disorder in New Zealand is 13 years (Oakley, Browne et al., 2006, cited in Williams, 2014). Generally, most children and adolescents do not receive adequate support when suffering from an anxiety disorder (Anticich, Barrett, Silverman, Lacherez, & Gillies, 2013, cited in Lucas, 2014). Therefore with the increasing rates of young people identified with anxiety and depression it is definitely

an issue that needs urgent attention. Finally, the education sector would benefit from learning what works in relation to the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme in a New Zealand context, what needs adapting and also how the teachers and the students experience the programme and how they use the strategies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter explores the link between mental health issues and learning, particularly anxiety and depression, showing the need for interventions to address these issues. A range of available preventive and targeted programmes and interventions are defined and discussed such as universal, selective, indicated and targeted programmes. This leads onto the introduction of *MY FRIENDS Youth*, which is used mainly as a universal programme. It's main aims are discussed and various international research is explored which show it's success in many ways such as the reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms and the improvement in self-esteem and social skills. Other aspects are explored such as the social validity of the programme, what strategies students found most useful as well as adaptations that were made to the programme. Finally, there is a review of a recent national, New Zealand evaluation on *MY FRIENDS Youth* conducted by NZCER in conjunction with Victoria University.

The wellbeing of children and programmes that aim to address mental health issues is a large research area, which covers a multitude of areas including resiliency, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, anger and several others. Many of these programmes have shown to be successful, and those that are used with some type of CBT have been researched most widely. This has shown to be successful in supporting students with anxiety (Neil & Christensen, 2009).

Introduction

The link between mental health and learning has been made in relation to both anxiety and depression. The effects of depression can result in poor attention and memory and therefore students will not be in a position to learn effectively as their ability to concentrate on tasks will be affected. Depression can also result in students losing hope and interest in things that previously were important to them, including school (Davison & Neale, 1994). Speaking to others becomes labour-some as those affected by depression would rather be silent and on their own. They also struggle to

solve problems as they become pessimistic (Barrett, 2012b). At different ages there can be varied signs of depression as young people may be aggressive, fidgety and more active in an irritable type of way. In contrast, adolescents can show other signs such as being antisocial, pessimistic and use more negative self-talk (Barrett, 2012b).

Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011, p. 406) state that “extensive developmental research indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater wellbeing and better school performance”. These researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 213 schools totalling 270, 034 students at kindergartens, primary schools and colleges. They found that those students who participated in such programmes showed significantly improved attitudes, behaviours, academic performance and social and emotional skills compared to control groups.

The effects of anxiety on learning have also been documented. Kashani and Orvaschel (1990) conducted a study of 210 students (boys and girls) using three different age groups, which were 8, 12 and 17-year olds. They showed various significant effects of a student’s mental health on their learning. All three groups of anxious students had more difficulty in their schoolwork than non-anxious students. Younger children (8-year olds) showed significantly more attention deficit disorder symptoms as well as more behavioural issues than non-anxious students. Twelve-year old students showed that turning into adolescents proved problematic for them as they had significantly more problems with school including the ability to concentrate and with their self-image compared to non-anxious students. The older, anxious 17-year olds showed more behavioural problems and school difficulties than non-anxious 17-year olds.

There are three types of preventive interventions available which are universal, selective and indicated. Universal interventions are delivered to the whole population of a group, such as all students in a year group and are advantageous when the individual cost is low and the intervention is acceptable to the population as well as effective (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). Selective preventive programmes target those individuals who have a higher risk of developing a mental disorder than others, as they possess certain risk factors. These could include those students selected for an anxiety intervention programme because one of their parents suffers from anxiety. Indicated preventive programmes target those high-risk individuals who have minimal or mild symptoms of a mental disorder or who have a predisposition towards one, due

to biological factors (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). These types of interventions are often the most costly, however can be worthwhile if they are effective as they are seen as an early intervention.

Indicated programmes can be aimed at students with anxiety or depression. One particular programme aimed at preventing depression is the Penn Prevention Programme (PPP). Through 12 sessions the programme covers topics such as the link between feelings and thoughts, assertion and negotiation, coping skills, decision making and problem solving. A facilitator with over 40 hours of PPP training and another facilitator with 30 hours of PPP training, who are either psychologists or nurses, run the programme. Results showed some success in reducing depression in the United States, but not when replicated in Australia (Roberts, Kane, Thomson, & Bishop, 2003).

Another programme, which is either selective or indicated, is the Cool Kids programme, which is used for young people aged between 7–16 that have anxiety symptoms or are at risk of developing them. Students are taught in small groups of about six per group and this is facilitated by a trained school counsellor via 10 weekly sessions which last one hour. There are also two booster sessions and two parent sessions to help reinforce the strategies learned. Overall, students learn cognitive restructuring, management strategies, graded exposure along with other options that can be included if necessary such as social skills and assertiveness (McLoone et al., 2006). In one particular evaluation with a low socio-economic group there were positive results seen as the students in the intervention group showed significant reductions in anxiety compared to a control group (Misfud & Rapee, 2005, cited in McLoone et al., 2006).

Targeted programmes are those that are aimed at students that already have a mental health issue such as anxiety or depression, usually at a clinical level. Some universal programmes can be run as targeted programmes if the disorder is severe enough. One such targeted programme aimed at reducing anxiety includes the Skills for Academic and Social Success programme (SASS), which is seen as suitable for treating those with social phobia. Students are selected via teacher nominations and the results of three self-report measures. The programme consists of 12 group sessions at school lasting 45 minutes, two individual sessions and two booster sessions led by a clinical psychologist. Two parent sessions, two school staff sessions and four social event weekends are also planned. Success was seen in one study, as 67% of the

treatment group no longer met a social phobia diagnosis, compared to 6% of the control group after programme participation (Masia-Warner et al., 2004, cited in McLoone et al., 2006).

Another targeted programme aimed at reducing anxiety is Worrybusters. This programme uses peer tutoring, where anxious adolescents teach younger students various skills to help manage the younger students anxiety. Once the adolescents complete the 8-lesson programme, they then tutor primary children who have anxious symptoms. Each lesson lasts for 90 minutes where students learn coping skills, breathing exercises and methods to face their fears via various means such as discussions, videos, books and role-plays. Some efficacy was seen, however study limitations restricted the success, due to the small sample size and no control group or follow up (Cullen, 2013).

Furthermore, Travellers is another indicated programme aimed at students who have a range of issues such as experiencing loss or showing emotional distress. It involves students (usually year 9, aged 12–14 years old) in small groups learning strategies based on CBT where students get to challenge any negative thoughts or responses they have. Topics covered include losses, transitions and ways to deal with these and accessing support. A trained facilitator runs the programme and students are selected via an online screening tool (Robertson, Boyd, Dingle & Taupo, 2012). This programme has been run in New Zealand secondary schools with short term success showing reduced emotional distress, better peer relationships, increased positive thoughts and an increased ability to express feelings (Dickinson, 2004, cited in Robertson et al., 2012).

Stockings and colleagues (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of the joint efficacy of the three preventive interventions (universal, selective and indicated) of both anxiety and depression. The young people studied ranged between 5–18 years old and were from 146 randomised controlled trials, with over 46,000 participants. Results indicated that all three preventive measures were effective up to 9 months, with universal programme studies effective up to 12 months. Findings also suggest that universal preventions showed greater reductions in the onset of depression compared to selective and indicated studies. For universal preventions up to 12 months, there was an improvement on the impact of the intervention if the teacher delivered it or other school personnel compared to a clinician or researcher. Overall, this has important implications moving forward.

Wong, Kady, Mewton, Sunderland and Andrews (2014) measured the effectiveness of two internet-delivered cognitive-behavioural programmes. These came under the umbrella of This-way-up schools: combatting depression and overcoming anxiety and are built on CBT principals. They state that there are very few universal prevention programmes for anxiety and depression and an internet based programme would have several advantages such as low cost, high implementation fidelity and having the ability to monitor it's use. There are seven lessons in the depression course and six in the anxiety course which both contain cognitive-behavioural components with the focus on acquiring certain skills such as managing thoughts, emotions and behaviours in relation to either anxiety or depression. Each course's duration lasts 6–7 weeks and sessions last 40 minutes. The first 20 minutes is online as students follow a cartoon storyline where real life problems are solved followed by class discussions stimulated by worksheets. Class teachers run the programme and no experience to facilitate the programme is necessary. Data from 12 Australian schools was obtained from three groups, which were either an anxiety or depression preventive programme or usual school condition, with a total of 265 participants (age 14–16 years) completing pre and post intervention data. However, this was from an original 976 students. Results indicate success at post intervention as significant improvements in anxiety and depression were found in those students who received the depression intervention in relation to the control group, and also improvements in anxiety seen for those who received the anxiety intervention.

Another universal programme aimed at reducing depression is the Positive Think Programme, which aims to reduce depressive symptoms in young people aged 8–9 years old. It does this by teaching a combination of cognitive and behavioural strategies aimed at increasing resilience (Rooney et al., 2006). These researchers conducted a study with 72 children in an intervention group and 48 children in a control group and found reductions in depressive symptoms at post-intervention and also fewer children developed a depressive disorder nine months later when followed up.

Overall, there are numerous benefits of universal programmes as they have the ability to scoop up a greater amount of young people without labelling as well as help normalise feelings of anxiety or depressive symptoms. The lack of stigma associated to universal programmes is also an added advantage. In a recent systematic, literature

review on effective anxiety interventions in schools, Ryan (2013) states other barriers to access in clinical settings, therefore further reinforcing the benefits of universal programmes. These include the problem of scheduling appointments and transport to them, treatment apprehension, lack of time and also how some students don't get picked up, as they are not diagnosed.

The *MY Friends Youth Programmes*

Early studies using the range of *FRIENDS* programmes regarding the treatment of anxious children and adolescents were around using these to reduce anxiety in individuals whom showed signs of this or whom were clinically anxious and were facilitated by mental health professionals (Barrett, Short, Fox & Westcombe, 2001; Shortt et al., 2001). However, this had various disadvantages. First, the cost in running these was quite expensive and not very sustainable regarding demand. Secondly, the stigma associated with being singled out was also something students saw as an issue. Therefore, there seemed a need to use more universal programmes, which were seen as more preventive and aimed at early intervention (Neil & Christensen, 2009).

One of the main aims of the *FRIENDS* programmes is to reduce anxiety, which was achieved in several studies. One universal study that was conducted with students who exhibited high levels of anxiety as well as those who did not, showed reduced levels following participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme (Lowry-Webster, Barrett and Lock, 2003). The study involved 594 Australian children (aged 10–13) with a quarter of these randomly assigned to a waitlist group. They found that 12 months after programme completion, 85% of those participants that were in the intervention group, whom scored above the clinical level for anxiety and depression, previous to the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, no longer met this level. This was compared to about 31% in the control group. Measures were via the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS), Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) and the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children (ADIS-C third edition). The programme was taught by teachers who had attended the official training days required.

Similar findings were also seen in earlier research in Australia in a targeted study (Shortt et al., 2001) when the *FRIENDS for Life* programme was used for anxious children. There were 71 participants (aged 6–10 years) with 54 participants

assigned to the intervention group and the remainder to a waitlist group. Results indicated that 69% of children showed no signs of anxiety after the programme compared to 6% in the wait-list group. Moreover, a universal Swedish study of 50 children (8–10 year olds) taught by teachers, saw reductions in anxiety in children who previously exhibited high levels of anxiety prior to taking part in a universally run *FRIENDS for Life* programme (Ahlen, Breitholtz, Barrett & Gallegos, 2012). These results were also seen via the SCAS. Sykes (2009) also reported a reduction in anxiety in a targeted study of seven English students who participated in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme, which was facilitated by an educational psychologist.

Barrett, Farrell, Ollendick and Dadds (2006) continued work from Lock and Barrett's (2003) longitudinal study, as 669 children from 2003 were involved in this universal study. In 2003 the students were in Grade 6 (age 10–11 years) and Grade 9 (age 13–14 years) consisting of approximately half boys and girls and just under half in the control group. This study aimed to establish if there would be reductions in the intervention group in anxiety in the two age ranges at 12, 24 and 36 months follow up after the programme. Students in the younger grade showed more success in reductions in anxiety than the older grade, which showed no significant reductions. This was consistent for the 12-month follow up to 36-month follow up. They also found that girls in the intervention group showed a more significant reduction in anxiety compared to boys, however only up to 24 months. They conclude that earlier intervention is better.

Similar reductions of anxiety were found in an Irish study of 244 students (average age 13 years) across 14 schools after taking part in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, which was facilitated by teachers as part of a universal study. Before the programme, 18.8% of students showed elevated anxiety levels, which reduced to 10.2% after, shown by results from the SCAS (Henefer & Rodgers, 2011). The parents' version also confirmed this.

Furthermore, in a universal study of 638 German children (9–12 year olds), those youngest (9–10 year olds) showed reductions in anxiety in the treatment group immediately after participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. However, even though reductions in anxiety were seen in older children (11–12 year olds) these did not occur until 6- and 12-month, follow-ups as measured by the SCAS (Essau, Conraddt, Sasagawa, & Ollendick, 2012). Reductions in anxiety were also noted by

Stallard and colleagues (2005) in a study of 213 primary children (9–10 year olds) in England, after participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, which were statistically significant. Nurses who attended a mandatory two-day training taught this and results were seen via the SCAS.

Likewise, in their study of 204 Australian non-English-speaking background students (7–19 year olds), Barrett, Sonderegger and Sonderegger (2001) identified a reduction in anxiety in all age groups after participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* or *MY FRIENDS Youth* programmes as measured by the RCMAS. The intervention group improved in their anxiety level compared to those in a waitlist group. Similarly, reductions in anxiety were seen in a study of 20 young, former-Yugoslavian, female (14–19 years) refugees living in Australia whom were either assigned to a waitlist or intervention group. This was measured by the SCAS and even though this is generally used with younger children, it was seen as appropriate given the simple language involved, as the young people were non-English-speaking background students (Barrett, Moore & Sonderegger, 2000).

Gallegos, Rodriguez, Gomez, Rabelo and Gutierrez (2012) were interested in the effect the Spanish version of the *FRIENDS for Life* programme would have on various factors, one of which being anxiety on a group of 10 girls (aged 9–10) who lived in an orphanage part-time in Mexico. Their symptoms of anxiety showed positive improvements after the programme, however reductions in their overall anxiety were not statistically significant. Another study using the Spanish version was that of Gallegos, Linan-Thompson, Stark and Ruvalcaba (2013) who evaluated the effectiveness of the *FRIENDS for Life* programme with 1030 fourth and fifth grade students (aged 8–13) from Mexico. Half the students were in a control group. They wanted to establish whether there was a decrease in the participants' anxiety symptoms, however no significant difference between the groups was seen. Various limitations are discussed such as the large class sizes.

In their study of 1257 students (aged 9–12 years) in England, Stallard and colleagues (2014) found reductions in anxiety 12 months after students' participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, seen via the SCAS. Two health professionals and a classroom teacher taught the programme. However, no reductions were seen when a teacher led this with two assistants or when the school ran the programme as usual with the classroom teacher facilitating the programme on their own. Similarly,

Stallard, Simpson, Anderson, Hibbert and Osborn (2007) saw reductions in anxiety, in 106 English primary aged children (aged 9–10 years) three months after the *FRIENDS for Life* intervention when it was taught as a universal programme by two health nurses and a teacher as seen by the SCAS. Another English study saw a decrease in anxiety as Stallard and colleagues (2005) wanted to establish whether the *FRIENDS for Life* programme could reduce anxiety in 213 children (aged 9–10) from 6 primary schools. They found that after the intervention, anxiety decreased significantly as seen by the SCAS.

Furthermore, the *FRIENDS for Life* programme showed considerable success with 58 children (aged 9–14) from four schools in another universally run Scottish study (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010), as researchers found reduced levels of anxiety in the students (self reported). This was sustained four months after the intervention.

In addition, reductions in anxiety were also seen after a time delay in other studies such as that of Mostert and Loxton (2008) with 46 students (12 year olds) from South Africa from low socio-economic backgrounds that participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. This was seen at four months and six months after the intervention and measured by the SCAS. A more recent Australian study involving 69 students (10–12 year olds) who were also from a low socio-economic area showed reduced anxiety levels (Iizuka, Barrett, Gillies, Cook & Marinovic, 2015). However this was only observed in the ‘at risk’ group after participating in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme when it was run universally. No changes were observed in the ‘not at risk’ group.

Moreover, a Dutch study that showed reductions in anxiety in students after participation in a targeted *FRIENDS for Life* programme, was that of Kusters, Chinapaw, Zwaanswijk, van der Wal and Hans (2015). These were also maintained a year later. Their study used 339 children from 25 schools in the intervention group and a smaller number (157) in the control group from 17 schools (aged 8–13 years) whom all showed elevated levels of anxiety before participation as shown by the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS). However, reductions seen were self reported and were not consistent with what teachers and peers thought. Reductions in anxiety were also more noticeable in girls compared to boys. Workers from a mental health organisation facilitated the programme.

Interestingly, Batra (2013) noted reductions in anxiety in 36 children aged 4–13 years after participating in the ‘*Fun FRIENDS*’ and ‘*FRIENDS for Life*’

programmes in Hong Kong, relative to control groups. Moreover, of interest were notable reductions in some parents' anxiety levels that took part in the study.

One other main aim of the *FRIENDS for Life* and *MY FRIENDS Youth programmes* is to decrease symptoms of depression or reduce the risk of developing this. Both of these aims were met in one such study with Mexican students (Gallegos et al., 2013) as measured by the Spanish version of the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI). Another Mexican study (Gallegos et al., 2012) with girls living in an orphanage part-time showed a reduction of a subscale of the negative mood of the Spanish version of the CDI. This was in relation to one of the questions regarding being alone.

The *FRIENDS for Life* programme's results showed a marked improvement in the children's emotional wellbeing in another study (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010) shown by reduced levels of low mood, however this was self-reported. Essau and colleagues (2012) also found reductions in depressive symptoms in their study of German students who had participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme at 6-month and 12-month follow up measured by the RCADS. Similarly, in Australia, Lowry-Webster and colleagues (2003) found that 12 months after participating in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, 91.4% of students in the intervention group (not at the clinical level) showed they were still not at risk of developing anxiety and depression compared to 74.8% of the waitlist group as measured by the CDI. Furthermore, Ahlen and colleagues (2012) found in their Swedish study that there was a reduction in depressive symptoms in children after participating in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme as seen by SCAS.

A further goal of the *FRIENDS* programmes is to increase resilience in participants. In their Scottish study, Liddle and Macmillan (2010) found a positive impact on the children's overall self-esteem, which they stated as critical to resilience. This was measured by the Culture-free Self-Esteem questionnaire (CFSE). General self-esteem also increased in another Australian study (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001) in primary non-English-speaking background students who took part in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, as measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) used for primary aged students. However, this was not seen in older students who took part in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme, which was measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which is seen as more suitable for high school students. Both

measures were seen as suitable for non-English-speaking background students. In their Mexican study of girls from an orphanage, Gallegos and colleagues (2012) saw an increase in their 'self-esteem at home' and 'with peers' as measured by the Spanish version of the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI).

Furthermore, several studies in England showed increases overall in self-esteem. Stallard and colleagues (2007) measured students' self-esteem six months before the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, at the beginning of the programme and three months after the programme. Results showed no change at the start of the programme but significant improvements in self-esteem three months after, as seen by the CFSE Questionnaire Form B. Results saw the high-risk group as being those who benefitted the most. Additionally, also in England, Stallard and colleagues (2005) found that after primary students participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme their self-esteem increased as measured by the CFSE Questionnaire Form B. A final English study also saw that 3 months and 12 months after the intervention there were significant, positive changes in self-esteem as measured by the CFSE Questionnaire Form B, signalling a sleeper effect (Stallard, Simpson, Anderson and Goddard, 2008). However, in a high-risk group there were no significant reductions in self-esteem.

Interestingly, a recent study has found that there was a need to support teachers better to be able to increase their own resilience and also enable them to facilitate improved emotional outcomes in students. There were 23 teachers in an Australian study who completed pre and post-intervention surveys and according to the Resilience Scale (RS), results showed that there was a significant increase in the resilience shown in teachers. The researchers suggest this is most likely due to the coaching or PD they received (Iizuka et al., 2015).

Closely linked to self-esteem is the hope self-concept, which resulted in an increase in girls at a Mexican orphanage after participation of the Spanish version of *FRIENDS for Life* programme (Gallegos et al., 2012). This was measured by the Children's Hope Scale (CHS), which is a self-report measure and was translated into Spanish for this.

Common themes around the social validity were found among studies including the programme to be well liked by students or that they found it valuable or that parents and children were highly satisfied with it (Ahlen et al., 2012; Barrett, Shortt et al., 2001; Rose et al., 2009; Sykes, 2009). Overall, students would recommend it (Davidson, 2011; Stallard et al., 2005) and all teachers stated this in one

study (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013). In another study (Shortt et al., 2001) parents and children both rated the programme as positive with parents rating it about 91% on a scale for its overall evaluation and stated that all sessions were helpful. Most children (83%) in this study rated the programme as fun. Other studies showed that most students enjoyed the *FRIENDS for Life* programme (Stallard et al., 2005) with one study showing that 98% of students stated this (Ahlen et al., 2012). Most parents (83%) of 52 Canadian students thought the programme was extremely important to be taught in schools.

Other themes were noted such as the need to adapt and supplement content such as changing words and phrases as there are a lot of Australian words or scenarios (Davidson, 2011; Henefer & Rodgers, 2013), more time for preparation and delivery (Davidson, 2011; Henefer & Rodgers, 2013) and that there was too much writing (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001; Cooley, Boyd & Grados, 2004; Henefer & Rodgers, 2013). Davidson (2011) suggests using the programme with the whole class for the best impact.

Furthermore, some studies also aimed to determine what strategies the students found most useful, and results show that some were more useful than others. The strategy of 'inner helpful thoughts' seemed most useful in several studies including Canadian students (Rose et al., 2009), Mexican girls (Gallegos et al., 2012), and with children and high school, Australian non-English-speaking background students (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001). This latter study also showed that both children and high school non-English-speaking background students found the strategies of relaxation and helping others to feel good most useful. Students in another study (Rose et al., 2009) found the strategies involving the coping step plan and learning to problem solve most useful. Younger children in another study found the strategy of self-rewards most useful, whereas adolescents mentioned graded exposure (Barrett, Short et al., 2001). However there were cultural differences noted overall in terms of the strategies different cultures found most useful as Chinese and mixed ethnic groups found the relaxation strategies useful, but former-Yugoslavian students barely found it useful at all (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001).

In addition to this is the belief that many researchers have mentioned in regards to making the programme more culturally enhanced. As shown above, this is only one example of how different cultures prefer different strategies. The same was noted as to what types of learning or interests different cultures prefer. In the above

study, former-Yugoslavian students prefer topical issues regarding adolescence compared to Chinese students who are more serious and are more concerned with issues related to cultural differences. Researchers in this study suggest having more open forums to allow more discussion around personal interests or concerns. Participants commented that they would prefer more art, music, and creative stories that are more relevant to them. Other studies have stated that students would prefer more group discussions such as female, former-Yugoslavian adolescents in Australia (Barrett et al., 2000) or that more discussions should occur to replace some reading and writing as one American teacher did because of low ability (Cooley et al., 2004).

Additionally, many activities from *MY FRIENDS Youth* and *FRIENDS for Life* enabled participants to interact with each other and some studies sought to establish whether there was an increase in the social skills of the participants as a result of their participation, even though the programmes are not specifically designed to develop these in participants. Significantly improved social skills were observed in a targeted Scottish study (Liddle & MacMillan, 2010) after participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme in both primary and secondary school students. This was measured via the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), where both primary and secondary versions were used. These required the teachers and parents to complete these in relation to how they view the students' social skills after the intervention. These improvements were not sustained however, four months after the intervention.

Moreover, Essau and colleagues (2012) showed in a study of German students who participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme, that there was a main effect of time found on the social skills scale for those in the intervention group. However there was no significant difference compared to a control group. Social skills were measured via the Social Skills Questionnaire.

Overall, as discussed there are various positive aspects of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* and *FRIENDS for Life* programmes mentioned by several studies, however many have incorrectly mentioned that these are evidence-based programmes according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). However, this is not the case as the WHO has actually only endorsed it as a promising effective treatment programme in regards to the prevention of anxiety (World Health Organisation, 2004).

Furthermore, Maggin and Johnson (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of *MY FRIENDS Youth* and *FRIENDS for Life* that evaluated 17 studies that met various criteria. This included the studies having to use a *FRIENDS* version of the

programme, be used at a kindergarten or school, be implemented in a school or classroom, be evaluated with a control group, use a standard measure of anxiety and be published in English. They aimed to assess the methodological strength of the *FRIENDS* programmes and whether this treatment was effective in schools and classrooms. They stated that the programme does not meet certain criteria to enable it to be recognised as an evidence-based programme. They stress that more research is needed to address the methodological weaknesses of previous studies. This is due to mixed success in results from the studies in their systematic review. Overall, low risk students who fell under the clinical threshold for anxiety showed reduced anxiety levels after the programme and up to 12 months, however this was not apparent after 12 months. Moreover, high-risk students showed no change after the treatment and after 12 months, suggesting the need for more to be done with elevated risk students.

Implications are discussed such as clear plans for those students who have high anxiety, more intense treatments for students still showing anxiety after group interventions and schools to continue with programme elements in other school areas. It is also suggested to support those who have made improvements in their anxiety levels to maintain this after 12 months, through use of booster sessions or extending the programme duration. They also suggest using teachers more to implement the programme instead of psychologists and counsellors due to time and financial restrictions.

Furthermore, Neil and Christensen (2009) conducted a systematic review of various programmes that were either school based or early intervention programmes for anxiety. They identified 27 randomised controlled trials consisting of 20 different programmes that aimed to prevent anxiety or intervene when there was an early onset. They aimed to describe and identify these programmes and ascertain their ability in reducing the symptoms of anxiety. Other aims were to establish how effective they were in regards to whether they were universal, selective or indicated programmes.

Results indicated that over 75% of the programmes showed significant reductions in anxiety. Larger effect sizes and more significant trials were seen in universal programmes compared to selective and indicated programmes. Most studies were based on CBT principles, however not all utilising this approach showed success. The *FRIENDS* programme was mentioned in respect to being seen as successful in the style of presentation and that other programme developers should look to this style as this may help elicit the desired effects and engage participants

effectively. A quarter of programmes used teachers to deliver the programme and researchers commented that this would lead to more sustainable delivery compared to other researchers or health professionals. This also contributed to a higher success rate in the percentage of trials run.

Long-term evaluations are also discussed as some programmes show effective results long after the programme finishes. Booster sessions are also mentioned as only 2 programmes use these; SASS and *FRIENDS*. These programmes both showed positive effects. Overall, they suggest as school based programmes work they should be implemented on a wider scale.

The New Zealand MY FRIENDS Youth evaluation

A New Zealand evaluation of the introduction of the programme in the pilot schools was undertaken (MacDonald et al., 2015). The evaluation examined the fidelity of the programme, whether the outcomes for students and teachers had been beneficial and how the programme fitted into the cultural and educational context of New Zealand schools. Students' and teachers' views of the programme were measured by quantitative data (Wellbeing@School surveys) before, soon after and post programme in over 2000 students from 26 schools and 31 teachers. Qualitative case studies were also completed with interviews of 17 staff members and 160 students from five schools.

The results showed that Māori/Pacifica students rated the programme higher than New Zealand European students (59%) in regards to whether the programme was worth doing with Pacifica (72%) rating it higher than Māori (62%). Most students agreed that they were using strategies from the programme (56%) and that it would be useful in the future (69%).

Most teachers (78%) thought students were more aware of their feelings because of the programme, believed it enabled students to know each other better (62%) and fostered a sense of community (65%) (MacDonald et al., 2015).

The evaluation showed that the largest shifts showing increased student wellbeing centred around three items from the Wellbeing@School survey. These were in relation to whether at school, students are taught to think about others feelings, know what to do when getting bullied or hassled and can manage their

feelings. However, these shifts were not maintained several months after programme completion, showing a need for booster sessions, which most schools did not do.

In the national evaluation, those who facilitated the programme (mostly P.E/health teachers) generally had positive views on it, valued the professional development (P.D) and networking and had a high level of fidelity (MacDonald et al., 2015). However, some teachers did not complete the programme due to time restraints. Teachers ensured visual images enhanced the programme and stated students appreciated this. Teachers noted there was strong evidence of peer and experiential learning and would adapt the programme in the future as there was a lot of content to get through. Overall, most teachers said it was worth doing and would continue to use this in the future.

There were many positive aspects of the programme in regards to the New Zealand cultural and educational context. Most teachers believed the programme was compatible with the New Zealand Curriculum key competencies and the health and P.E curriculum and was also appropriate for Māori and Pacifica students. Schools will continue to run the programme as it has leadership support and fits well within most schools and aligns well within other initiatives they are doing. Schools also feel they are able to support children if problems arise from the programme. Parent involvement was minimal in most schools, with most just including information in a newsletter or relating to homework students receive. However, the evaluation report noted that most planned to do more in the future to involve parents.

Sustainability issues are discussed such as funding issues in regards to the student workbook and the impact of teachers leaving schools and new teachers having to be trained up. There also needs to be more done in regards to the impact on students with special educational needs (MacDonald et al., 2015).

As part of the evaluation, case studies were undertaken and results show it is useful within a New Zealand context (Lucas, 2014; Sheerin, 2014; Williams, 2014). Data were collected from focus groups, observations and teacher/counsellor/principal semi-structured interviews. Students from these studies thought the programme was valuable and made a difference to their mental health and wellbeing, now and in the future (Lucas, 2014; Sheerin, 2014). All three researchers mentioned that teachers said it enabled *MY FRIENDS Youth* to be successfully integrated into the health and P.E curriculum with minor changes and adaptations.

Students and staff also saw it as a valuable, fun programme to build resilience. All three researchers also confirmed that teachers either thought the student work book contained too much writing or literacy level difficulties, which were adapted by one teacher whom replaced some aspects of writing with discussions (Williams, 2014). Lucas (2014) noted that teachers found a moderate to high level of student engagement in the programme, and found the impact of *MY FRIENDS Youth* being more positive for girls.

This chapter has shown that there is a link between mental health issues and learning and the importance of addressing these have been discussed by using preventive or targeted interventions to reduce or prevent various issues such as anxiety and depression in particular. Universal, selective and indicated programmes are seen as preventive programmes and these were discussed with the importance of universal programmes being well documented and shown to be advantageous for many reasons. Targeted programmes were discussed to meet the need for particular individuals or groups who have a specific mental health issue.

Internationally, *MY FRIENDS Youth* has been shown to be effective, in particular as a universal programme for the reduction and prevention of anxiety and depressive symptoms in young people. Other benefits have also been discussed such as increases in self-esteem, social skills and improved understanding of feelings, emotions and strategies to use which help young people cope with various challenges they have. Internationally, adaptations have occurred to make the programme more applicable to certain cultures and the most useful aspects of the programme have been mentioned. The recent *MY FRIENDS Youth* national evaluation in New Zealand was discussed which showed success in year 9 at several secondary schools, as students' and teachers' views of the programme were explored.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was used in order to understand the experiences of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme from the perspectives of the school staff and students. An in-depth instrumental case study took place within one secondary school involving classrooms observations, and interviews with two teachers, the counsellor, the principal, nine students and four parents. This approach enabled a detailed account of how one school facilitates and supports the programme, and how the teachers and their students learned and used the strategies involved in the programme. This helped to understand the case holistically and also to analyse the case in order to get an understanding of the overall programme.

Research that aims to explore a phenomenon in-depth and from the experiences of those involved mainly takes a qualitative research. *Case studies* are an example of qualitative research where one or more cases are explained in detail (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Flyvbjerg (2006) describes an advantage of the case study being able to get close to real life situations as they occur, and in this case being on-site within a classroom when *MY FRIENDS Youth* sessions took place, and being able to interview those involved enabled a level of ‘closeness’ to the programme implementation. Case studies address exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research questions, and have a common thread where they all focus on a case holistically, meaning that they encompass a case as a whole unit. Cases are also seen as having two contexts, internal and external which allows them the explanation of how the case functions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

A case study approach

There are three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). An *intrinsic* case study allows a researcher to understand a particular case and is typical in education, especially when evaluating programmes. As the name suggests a *collective* case involves studying multiple cases, sometimes across multiple sites so the researcher can get a better picture overall of a topic. An *instrumental* case study is about finding out about something in general,

rather than the actual case, and was considered the most appropriate type of case study for this research as it allows the researcher to understand the intricacies of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995, cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2008). It is undertaken to facilitate understanding of a phenomenon, in this case a mental health programme for young people.

This instrumental case study was completed across one secondary school site. In-depth analysis within a site is important as it allows a researcher to get various viewpoints to enable a true, deep understanding of the phenomenon. This allows the researcher to understand the meaning the participants gain from the experience. Various aspects can impact on how an initiative unfolds such as the norms, school culture, rules, and expectations, and therefore it was important to spend time at the school as well as having access to related documents.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in educational research is an important consideration because there is a possibility that undue harm can come to participants if certain care is not taken. Therefore, it is important that the research is discussed with suitably qualified peers and by submitting it for review for approval by a credited Ethical Committee before being undertaken. Several ethical guidelines are discussed by the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) when conducting research, such as the rights of the participants given priority over the researchers and any harmful effects or unintended consequences must be avoided during the research. The participants should have the capacity to consent and in the case of children there should be parental consent also. Any possible adverse effects of the research should be noted and discussed prior to the consent from the participants and research stopped as soon as possible if this occurs. Confidentiality refers to the information of the participant and their identity or other confidential information being kept private (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) and it must be stated whether the information collected is to be used for any other purposes and if it is then participants must be advised regarding this. Due care must also be taken not to interfere with participants progress in education. Finally, the research should be available after an appropriate amount of time and the research should also be available for the participants to view.

Schools consist of rules, expectations and policies and research conducted in schools must not only follow these aspects, but also adhere to strict confidentiality

and ethical procedures. Tracy (2010) discusses various ethics, which need to be abided by such as *relational* ethics where a researcher is mindful of their behaviour and the effects it has on others. They also need to be observant of *exiting* ethics, which refers to how a researcher shares their findings and leaves a setting.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is “agreeing to participate in a study after being informed of it’s purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, alternative procedures, and limits of confidentiality” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 109). This is important because if a participant is not given all the relevant information then they may agree to participate, but not entirely understand the consequences for the consent. Once all the relevant information has been given to the participants and they understand this and they still agree to participate, only then has informed consent been gained. If a child is under the age of 14, it is preferable that informed consent is gained from a parent/caregiver also (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). However, depending on the participant’s age, informed consent can be gained from the parent/caregiver and the participant. Information sheets should generally accompany the consent form if the consent form does not provide all the necessary information and include things such as the purpose of the research, the length of time required to participate, and statements referring to being able to withdraw at any time without penalty and that information given will be kept confidential and names not used. (See appendix for information sheets and consent forms).

Bourke and Loveridge (2014) discuss informed dissent where a child has provided initial consent to participating in the research, but in fieldwork might change his/her mind and must be given the opportunity to do so. This is to ensure the child has the ability and the chance to say 'no' or to show their dissent through other means, for example body language. Therefore, a researcher needs to be alert to the body language and non-verbal cues or actions of participants as they may be unwilling to actually say 'no', even though they don't want to continue (Dockett & Perry, 2011, cited in Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). This includes whether there was any reddening of the face, moving about while sitting, twisting of hands, slowed responses and dropping of the head (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014).

Methodological Aspects

Data collection methods included observations, focus groups, document analysis, and interviews. These are explained below.

Observations

Observations can occur within a laboratory-type setting or within authentic settings, and can be qualitative and/or quantitative in approach. This study was qualitative and naturalistic in order to observe the students and their learning in context within the school environment, an approach outlined by Johnson and Christensen (2008).

When making observations a researcher makes field notes and writes down as much important information as possible during the observations and also soon after the observation. A researcher should also be aware of various 'tips for conducting fieldwork and qualitative observation' (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) including the ability to be reflexive, unobtrusive and alert at all times. There is a need to establish rapport, include descriptive detail, corroborate information and be empathetic to others. Other things to note include the need to remain neutral to participants' comments and try and include direct quotes if possible, and to do this, sometimes observations are recorded or discussions noted verbatim.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) describe four types of observer roles, which include the complete participant. This is where the observer is an insider whom is a member of a group that is unaware of their role. The participant-as-observer spends an extended amount of time with a group, however the group knows that they are a researcher whereas the observer-as-participant spends little time with a group observing. Finally, the complete observer observe a group from an outsiders perspective and usually the group is unaware they are being studied. This study used the observer-as-participant role.

Interviews

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were seen as appropriate as they enable a researcher to ask participants the same questions, but allow for open-ended answers. The questions are presented in the same order, and as a result it has the advantage of allowing for systematic data analysis. When doing so it is important to make use of various 'tips for conducting an effective interview' such as utilising probes, being

empathetic and ensuring the interviewee is doing most of the talking (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Document analysis

Document analysis is a form of secondary data that is helpful to use in conjunction with other data collection methods and can also help in the triangulation of data. The documents used in the study included the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Student Activity Book as well as the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Group Leader's Manual.

Focus groups

Focus groups are where a small group is interviewed regarding their opinion on a certain topic. Open-ended or semi-structured questions are used and the person facilitating the interview ensures the group are focussed on the topic at hand (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). They can have various purposes but in this case they were to be used as a way of finding out the students' opinions and views regarding the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme.

Ethics in Practice within this case study

Procedural ethics were adhered to, as I sought ethical approval from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee. I also adhered to the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) *Ethical guidelines 2010*, and the Victoria University *Human Ethics Policy*. Below I will outline specific ethical and cultural considerations. Confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to as my supervisor and I only saw information and the school was not mentioned, nor were any participant's names.

Informed Consent

The participants in this study were fully informed of the research before they agreed to participate. Informed consent was gained in a number of ways. First the teacher explained the study to the class and read out some of the information sheet so that those interested could read it themselves and take it home along with consent forms to ascertain consent if they wished. The participants had all the information in order to make a decision, were able to withdraw from the study without any penalty at any time and they gave their consent without being under pressure (Johnson &

Christensen, 2008). At the time of the interview, they were asked again if they wanted to participate. Various issues were addressed regarding informed consent in regards to working with children in research.

In regards to informed dissent the body language of the students was observed carefully at the time of the interview and what was unsaid was also monitored. Reasons for students wanting to withdraw, but not wanting to say no, could have been teacher's expectations of them and that parents had already given consent. However, there were no issues in this regard as students seemed quite confident and willing in the interviews.

Participants

The school was invited to participate in the project as the principal had already been informally approached to ascertain if the school would be interested in further information. The school expressed an interest and after I received full ethics approval, information sheets went to the principal and teachers to gain informed consent. The participants included the teachers and students of Year 9 of this secondary school. In addition the guidance counsellor and principal were interviewed and four parents. A subset of 12 students (a mix of boys and girls representing the cultures of the school), were invited to participate as well as their parents. However, there were nine students who took part in the interviews in total. The first group of five students consisted of three girls and two boys, which was culturally diverse as it contained NZ European, Māori and Samoan students. The students were initially interviewed as a focus group and then individually. There was one more boy who had given consent, however he was absent from school during the week of the interviews due to illness. His mother did participate in a parent interview however. The second group consisted of four students who were a mix of boys and girls containing Māori and NZ European students.

Setting

The school was selected because it has been involved in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme but was not one of the in-depth schools involved in the earlier national evaluation. This is a New Zealand secondary school in an urban area. The decile 9 school is a co-education college of Year 9 to Year 13 classes. The school has a roll of over 1400 students.

Methods

Given that the participating students were in Year 9, the information sheet and consent form were made clear and simple to understand. Parent/caregiver consent forms were included and incorporated a question on the form for the parent/caregivers to sign if they were willing to be interviewed, which four parents did.

Confidential information was stored in a safe place and only seen by either my supervisor or I. Anonymity and confidentiality of individuals was protected so that any information that was reported was done so in a way that the school or any individuals were not identifiable.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods included observations, focus groups, document analysis, and interviews.

Observations

A total of 14 observations occurred in class as this allowed me to observe what learning experiences occurred and listen to the student responses over a set period of time. This also allowed me to build rapport and trust and get to know the students, as I was saying hello and goodbye when seeing them each lesson and also had a chance to briefly talk to some students before and after class.

My role was one of 'observer as participant' as I had limited time in class and the participants knew I was a researcher. The teacher in the class I was observing gave full disclosure as they said to the class that I was there to observe how the programme is facilitated and examine how it is experienced to see what could be learned from their experiences or how it could be improved to help other students in New Zealand. I was also aware of the 'guidelines for directing qualitative observation' and the 'tips for conducting fieldwork and qualitative observation' (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

During the observations I generally sat at the back of the class and observed what went on in the room, including interactions and body language and listened to the conversations that took place. An advantage of this approach included being able to observe what actually happens, rather than what participants intend to happen. In total I observed 14 lessons, which consisted of the last seven lessons of the

programme with the first class and the first seven lessons of the second class which enabled me to get a picture of how it was facilitated from start to finish.

There were two Year 9 classes involved in the observations during the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme, which takes place typically over a 10-session period. However, in this school these sessions lasted for approximately 16 lessons as each session generally spilt over to the next. Within the case study school a teacher gave support of this approach. The counsellor, principal, teachers, students and parents were recruited by signing the consent forms after reading the information sheets. The focus of the observations was the teacher and the nine target students. In relation to the teacher the focus was on how the programme was facilitated and what adaptations took place regarding the programme and how these occurred, and the type of strategies that appeared to engage the students more than others.

I observed how the participating students engaged in the sessions, who with and why, and what skills, strategies and methods they learned. This data were recorded by following the students' individual and personal copies of the Student Activity Book and the teachers' Group Leader's Manual, and making notes on these. I also made other field-notes and memos including quotes from the teachers and students. Non-participating students in the class sessions were not observed directly and no data were recorded on them.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured as this approach was appropriate in this situation because it gave structure to the interviews but enabled participants to move into other areas if they deemed it important (see Appendices A–C). I ensured the interviewee was doing most of the talking and utilised probes effectively to keep the interview flowing. This also allowed the focus of the study to remain on track and helped the participants to have a starting point from where they could express their opinion honestly. The interviews took place in a private interview room near the main office at the school. Permission was granted for the interviews to be audio recorded and these were transcribed verbatim. Each interview took approximately 30–45 minutes.

After individual student consent was gained, and the written consent forms from school staff, parents and students were obtained I conducted the interviews. I explored what the students found useful to help them increase their resiliency and also

overcome day-to-day challenges. The participants were given a written statement containing information about the study and I also read this out to them. I reminded them that at any time if they felt uncomfortable they could leave the study or the interview, leave questions out or ask for clarification of the question. The same students who were interviewed individually were interviewed in focus groups. However, the second group of four students were only interviewed as a focus group. Parents were interviewed individually, however there were two parents present in one interview that both took part.

Document analysis

I used the Group Leaders' Manual and Student Activity Book workbook to conduct document analysis and to get an overview of the programme. The booklets formed the basis for further document analysis to determine what the programme intended, and how teachers and their students translated this into practice. I was able to use the process of stimulated recall interviews (SRI) to help with analysis. This is a technique to help us understand how people behave in such a way by discussing something they have been involved in by showing or playing them video or audio footage to help jog their memory (Dempsey, 2010). Showing the interviewee something they have written can also be a way to assist with SRI, so having the students' workbooks and their work within these was a useful part of the interview process. This aids the interviewee in remembering what they thought and said. This also had another beneficial advantage in that this formed the beginning of the individual interviews, which seemed to allow the students to feel at ease as they were discussing something that they had written and could explain what they were thinking at the time they wrote about the particular page on 'inner helpful thinking'.

Focus groups

These were seen as appropriate and complementary of other data given the nature of Year 9 students' inhibitions with interviews. The groups were homogeneous, rather than heterogeneous, as this enables better discussion (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Focus groups enabled the participants to build on others answers, and also seemed to enable some students to voice their opinion easier than just via individual interviews. The first group that was interviewed in a focus group also participated in

the interviews individually. This seemed to enable them to feel more relaxed when they were interviewed individually as I had already built up a rapport with them. (See appendix A for interview/focus group questions).

Data Analysis Methods

I used interim analysis which is a term used to describe "the cyclical process of collecting and analysing data during a single research study" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 531). This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the data. The data was read and reread throughout this process. I also used transcription through the use of an audio recorder and once this was completed, interviews were checked against the data for accuracy. Other methods such as memos were included, where ideas, thoughts and patterns were noted during the fieldwork. Inductive coding was also used to analyse the data. After reading the transcripts several times I used segmenting to separate various parts of the transcripts and then coded these accordingly into categories. The computer software NVivo, which complements the classifying process, aided this. These categories were then grouped into various sub-themes, which were then finally placed under more general themes (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). These themes were reviewed and linked back to how they relate to the research questions. Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-phase guide to thematic analysis also complemented this process to help analyse the data.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes.

Phase 3: Searching for themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.

Phase 6: Producing the report.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or validity refers to whether a study is plausible and is often discussed when comparing the quality of one study to another (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). As a researcher I was aware of 'researcher bias' where a researcher must be careful not to selectively record information that is what they want to find. To counter this I used the strategy of self-reflexivity where I was honest about any strengths or weaknesses (Tracy, 2010) and was aware of any bias. As a teacher within a regional health school, I was also aware that I needed to work within

a different frame of reference, as a researcher and not as a teacher. Therefore, I also tried to use negative-case sampling, where any results that disconfirmed what I was expecting to find were explored (Johnson & Christenson, 2008). This is when aspects of the case that were not what was expected are included as it enables original expectations to be revised.

Darwin (1958, cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006) described the method of avoiding bias toward verification when he used a golden rule, which was to note down any discrepancies in the data to be reflected upon. I ensured my study was transparent by discussing field-note practices and ensured I detailed any of the study's challenges (Tracy, 2010).

There were various challenges within the fieldwork, for example one teacher who initially agreed to be interviewed decided to withdraw from the study, so I said there was no pressure to continue and therefore the interview did not occur. Another issue involved the absence of a student during the week set aside for interviews, and given this was the last week before the holidays he did not take part in the study. However, his mother, who had already signalled interest to be interviewed, continued to take part. Therefore, in this instance it was not possible to triangulate the data between them and the teacher. Triangulation did occur though in this way as the teacher and two other children and their parents were interviewed.

Another challenge initially arose in getting consent forms from the students because the participating teacher taught the students only once a week and the students often forgot to bring back the forms. However, as a solution to this, we agreed that the students could give them to the office staff, which enabled the students to bring back their forms earlier if they chose. Furthermore, because of the timing of the second group being only half way through the programme the students seemed a bit reluctant to participate in the study, compared to the first group being at the end. Therefore, rather than the intended six students invited to be interviewed, only four agreed to do so. Another challenge was the involvement of parents. One parent worked until late so was only available for an interview later at night so this was arranged.

Trustworthiness was important for the research and developed through research supervision, the use of multiple data collection methods and sources, and the engagement with the participants regarding the findings of my study (participant

feedback). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework was used to complement the above strategies. This included establishing:

- Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings
- Transferability - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts
- Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated
- Confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

Lincoln and Guba describe a series of techniques that can be used to conduct qualitative research that achieves the criteria they outline. Several techniques are described by Lincoln and Guba that help conduct qualitative research including techniques to establish credibility. These include prolonged engagement where sufficient time is spent in the field, persistent observation where observations are continuous and detailed, triangulation where data is checked against other methods for verification. They also describe peer debriefing which is when the researcher discusses the research afterwards with the participants and member checking where results are checked with the participants for accuracy. They state that thick description which is detailed and thorough will help establish transferability and an inquiry audit will help establish dependability. This includes ensuring the research design, its details and reflections are all noted and described sufficiently. Finally, they describe techniques for establishing confirmability which include triangulation, an audit trail where independent observers can trace the research by following the research design and procedures described, and reflexivity where the researcher is self-reflective regarding any biases and predispositions they have (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Overall, the qualitative research report has been conducted in an ethical manner which has used appropriate methods to collect the information as well as when interacting with the participants. I had an informal meeting with the teacher I had observed and interviewed and showed some of the findings from the results and discussion sections as a form of member checking. I also said I was very appreciative of the time I was granted in the class and at the school. I also said the thesis would be available once it was completed. Reflexivity has been important in this study and methods used to do this included keeping a notebook to jot down any reflections and challenges I have had along the way.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the case study. The case study methodological approach enabled the collection of rich data to explore the deep meaning from teachers and students. The results suggest that the students viewed the *MY FRIENDS Youth* resilience programme as a positive, useful programme that enabled them to learn various strategies to deal with challenging scenarios in their life. Three major themes emerged involving (1) student centred outcomes, (2) implications for teachers and educators and (3) enhancing school community. Within each theme a range of sub-themes are presented. Overall, results indicated that the programme was positive for the community and with various adaptations it could continue to enable other young people to learn strategies to aid their development of resilience.

Student Centred Outcomes

The first major theme centres on the outcomes for students. How students learned and what they learned to apply to their everyday and school life through the *MY Friends Youth* Resilience programme was identified through the study. This theme represents an analysis of all new strategies and skills that the students identified as learning. It incorporates the strategies that students reported finding most useful and how these were normalised into their everyday lives. It also encompasses how the development of resilience for students evolved. This theme also identifies how students developed and used solution-focused aspects of the programme.

This theme creates the lens to explore the factors involved in enabling the strategies to be normalised (i.e. seen as everyday practice rather than a specialised approach for mental health support) as well as how the students reported becoming more resilient by using various strategies. It also details which strategies students found useful and how they engaged in a solution-focused approach when dealing with their specific difficulties or challenges.

The Strategies covered through (F.R.I.E.N.D.S)

A sub-theme of this was the strategies covered by the students. These strategies were an aspect of the programme and were generally taught by the teachers, and learned by students in a sequential order as outlined by the *FRIENDS*' acronym (see page 1, Student Activity Book).

The results are therefore presented in this sequence in part to represent the order in which the students learned these. Although the strategies and skills were taught in this sequential order there was some overlap. The first letter, F represented 'feelings' and enabled students to learn how to regulate their feelings and understand what their feelings mean. This was done within a whole class and involved strategies such as an activity that involved choosing a card that described how they were feeling that day and then to discuss with each other why they felt that way. The teacher was able to help those who were unsure or needed help with this.

For one boy it was simply "*I learnt how to deal with my feelings*" whereas for the teacher there was more to it:

The main thing was their ability to identify how they were feeling. That's the thing they seemed to lack the most. It gets them to be a little more mindful of their feelings. That's the thing they seem to lack, the mindfulness and the way they are feeling, and the people around them. (Teacher)

A teacher explains that the students can understand:

What certain feelings mean, they get to practise the mindfulness of how they are feeling and to be aware of the certain clues that set them down the path of anxiousness.

The skill of developing confidence and assertiveness was taught early on in the programme as this seemed directly related to how someone deals with their feelings.

The skills of self-regulation can be used in any scenario, at school before exams and assessments and workload issues, using the skills there, but also assertiveness and having the self-confidence to be strong in what they are thinking and feeling without being aggressive. (Teacher)

This enabled the students to realise that how they are feeling can be dealt with in a positive and constructive way.

The second letter of the *FRIENDS* acronym, R is where students learned the skill of relaxation. To do this, the teacher discussed the importance of why it is

necessary to relax. The teacher reinforced the relaxation strategy as they stated, “*if you are relaxed, you have good thoughts and this leads to positive behaviour*”.

Students then had to come up with five ways they like to relax and shared this with a partner. Many of the students suggested that they could easily use this strategy and suggested the teacher helped them learn it better.

You learn about how you can just take time out to just relax and go through things and how you can properly relax. (Year 9 boy)

The teacher definitely reinforced the relax... (Year 9 boy)

If I do have anxiety I could just relax and remember all the good thoughts and not the bad thoughts. (Year 9 girl)

The teacher suggested that the relaxation strategies were skills that students used widely and developed them quickly.

The relaxation one is probably the one they can pick up straight away and use. They can go for a walk or run, they can listen to music, play playstation. They say they use it the most. (Teacher)

The next aspect of the programme, representing the letter I (Inner helpful thoughts) is where students learned to change negative thoughts into positive thoughts. They did this by activities such as making happiness creations. This is where the students collated things that made them happy and were reminded to think of these things to help them stay positive. This reflected a positive change for the students as they were able to learn how to question any negative thoughts they had. The teacher reported how this was a difficult strategy for students to learn and that the students initially had to learn specifically the red (unhelpful or negative) thoughts and green (helpful or positive) thoughts before they could learn the orange (questioning) thoughts.¹ This was noted by the researcher during classroom observations when there were two sessions specifically based on the red and green thoughts before the orange thoughts were introduced, “*It takes time for them to get used to these [orange thoughts].*” (Teacher)

However, they finally got there. The teacher explained that it was about changing their thinking habits.

They definitely learnt the coping strategies, the red and green thoughts. When

¹ On page 30 of the MY FRIENDS Youth Activity Book for Youth the thoughts that challenge red thoughts are described as yellow to represent the middle traffic light. However within a New Zealand context, translated that is to orange from yellow.

they notice them thinking unhelpfully about a situation they have to be able to quickly change the way they feel about that and adopt a more helpful way of thinking. (Teacher)

We had to do some unhelpful and negative thoughts and sort of transfer them into helpful thoughts. (Year 9 girl)

An extension of this was that students learned how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours were all related. Class observations regarding various scenarios the students discussed reinforced this, as did scenarios witnessed in their workbooks. When discussing a scenario about having a t-shirt that their friends thought was lame, a student (Year 9 boy) suggested that a green thought would be “*it doesn’t really matter what they think of my t-shirt*”, which would lead to green, positive feelings “*I would feel on top*”. This would then lead to positive behaviour “*I would do more and wouldn’t be worried or anything*”.

In the *FRIENDS* acronym, E represents ‘Exploring solutions and coping step plans’. This strategy was all about finding solutions and facing whatever challenges that come their way. Classroom activities to support the students’ learning around this included brainstorms and discussions regarding diverse scenarios on ways the students could manage challenging situations. The coping step plan strategy was learned successfully by some students, shown by multiple points of view.

One of the things the kids said to me was that they really developed a learning plan, you chunk work, basically if you have a 5 week assignment, you do this by week 1, you signpost it all the way. (Principal)

Definitely learnt the steps and like breaking it up and things like that. (Year 9 boy)

By breaking it down into small steps. (Year 9 girl).

Other students learned other ways of coping with problems.

Maybe to share stuff, instead of keeping it in. (Year 9 girl)

Go out and be active and that makes you happy. (Year 9 boy)

One parent expressed his child specifically learned these strategies from the programme.

I would say the walking away from a situation rather than standing there and arguing with Mum, he also does the old, go and listen to music and have some timeout or actually go out for a run which is quite huge for him or going for a walk and he wasn’t doing that previously. Just having that was huge.

The acrostic letter N represents the strategy of ‘Now reward yourself’ which is about the students accepting that they have tried their best and that is to be rewarded. One way the students learned this was to have small rewards attached to their coping step plans. For example if students were doing an assignment, then after doing half an hour brainstorm, they could reward themselves with hanging out with friends. This seemed a skill students adopted quite easily. There is a lot of opportunity for this in different scenarios. Both girls and boys identified that they reward themselves. Girls for example noted, *“I reward myself for things that I don’t normally do” (Year 9 girl)*, and *“It’s good to reward yourself” (Year 9 girl)*. Similarly, a boy noted *“Rewarding yourself after everything you have done” (Year 9 boy)*.

The acrostic letter D represents ‘Do it every day’ and students learned the strategy of implementing what they have learned from the programme in various ways each day. They are to use the coping skills to help with any new challenges that come their way and to incorporate healthy activities into their lives. For example, one boy commented that he could join a rugby team. Another girl mentioned that she could *“Maybe do something different every day, not the same things, also if I didn’t know what football was I could go along and see if I like it.”*

The final letter of the acrostic, S represents ‘Stay strong inside’ and this is about sharing the skills with your family and community, and will be discussed in further detail in the final theme ‘building school community’. The types of activities used to teach this included discussions about how students could help others and making contracts around what the students could do to help friends, family and those in the community.

Most Useful Strategies

Some strategies from the programme were identified by the students as more useful than others. This seemed to be dependent on what particular situation they were faced with. This sub-theme entails what the staff, students and parents believed was most useful. However, the principal thought they were all useful.

All of them are. Anything that allows them to cope with smarter study is a good thing. Anything that allows them to cope with a better way in terms of having better relationships with others and respectful relationships is a positive thing. Anyone that allows them to just think of one thing at a time is something I needed to learn a lot earlier. Anything that is talked about the

value of being still and looking at your breathing and all those sort of things.
(Principal)

A focus group stressed that it depended on the situation. One girl in a focus group stated it depended on, *“who it is you have to deal with or what it is you have to deal with as some things are harder to deal with than others”*. Both boys and girls noted this. Girls mentioned that *“eating or listening to music”* (Year 9 girl), and another girl in the focus group added to this, *“They calm you down”* (Year 9 girl). They also mentioned scenarios at home such as *“If its an argument with family you can go separate yourself or go to a quiet place”* (year 9 girl) and *“If a speech you could practise in front of a mirror, or your family and work on that”* (Year 9 girl). Another mentioned *“If it’s school work you could ask someone to help”* (Year 9 girl). Similarly boys mentioned *“Going for a walk”* (Year 9 boy) and *“relaxing”*. Overall it seems the most useful strategies were relaxation, inner helpful thinking and exploring solutions and coping step plans.

Multiple viewpoints suggested relaxation was used as a strategy to help students feel calm and distance themselves from problems they have.

I usually just go for a run. It helps me relax and helps take off bad thoughts from my mind and just fill myself with fresh air and it makes me feel a lot better. (Year 9 girl)

I like to do Karate also as it is also a relaxational thing, kicking and punching and blocking because you can get all your anger into the air when you are kicking and blocking and that. (Year 9 girl)

Definitely the go for the walk or relax. Like leave the situation or listen to music or play music. (Year 9 boy)

To separate myself from the situation and think about it. (Year 9 girl)

Knowing when its time to have some time out and also that other people can be in a bad place and when they unload junk onto you is not a reflection of you, it’s more about what’s going on in their world. I suppose taking a step back and looking at what’s the deeper situation going on here, which I have seen him do where he just takes a step back and will come back later on and talk about something. Yes, stepping back and coming back later as he never used to do that so I attribute it as a tool which you guys have given him on that course. (Parent)

A teacher also noted that *“Using the relaxation strategies”* was most useful.

Inner helpful thinking and positive self talk emanated as a strategy that teachers saw being most useful for the students, more so than the parents and the students, possibly due to the students learning this concept earlier on in the course before the interview.

Personally, inner helpful thinking is the most useful strategy within the programme and I say that because kids and people in general that suffer from mental health issues, well what I have noticed are the kids who have low self esteem and low confidence in their own abilities so inner helpful thoughts is the most useful to help them to realise it's ok to fail or ok to not succeed and by not succeeding you are still learning from it and I think kids struggle with the thought of realising that just because they fail at something they are still succeeding or learning and I think that's, well I notice that if they think they can't do something they just don't do it or they just give up and they don't realise that there is still power in the learning process even if they do fail. So teaching them the inner helpful thinking is when they realise it's ok to not be good at everything. (Teacher)

Most useful is the red versus green thinking and how we get that to become more natural in our day to day lives. (Teacher)

However one teacher expressed a concern regarding this even though they thought it was useful in general. This teacher noted that “*Calling it attention training and going on forever wasn't terribly useful*”.

The acronym E which represented ‘Exploring solutions and coping step plans’ introduced several strategies that were most useful for students according to them and their teachers. The coping step plans were used to break bigger goals down into smaller steps with rewards along the way. Templates were provided in the official programme’s Student Activity Book as a scaffolding tool in which the students could write on.

Their 5 step plan and coping step plan was well worth learning. (Teacher)

To use coping step plans. (Year 9 boy)

The problem solving type coping strategies...I think that that's really good (Teacher)

However, even though this strategy was seen as useful, it was not without its issues. Firstly, one teacher thought it was “*clumsy, the way it is written.*” Another teacher believed that students needed to spend more time on this.

The class needs or some of the classes need a lot more practise of problem solving skills and realising that it's broken down into really small steps. So if I were to give an example of that, where the scenario of giving a speech that's due in 2 weeks, how can we make a coping plan, a lot of them only identify one step of writing the speech in one day, they still don't realise that it's still about breaking it out and not trying to tackle everything at once, and having small steps towards achieving the goal. Some of them get it really well but there is still a chunk of kids that really struggle to break the problem down into smaller achievable goals.

Another coping skills strategy was the CALM strategy which stood for Cool down, Acknowledge feelings, Listen and list and Make a solution. The Group Leader's Manual states this is "*an easy way to remember some guidelines for handling conflict in a way that is assertive for both parties*". One teacher stated this was "*well worth learning*" and during a classroom observation the researcher noted this approach was emphasised by another classroom teacher.

Another coping plan strategy was around 'managing bullying' and one student expressed that they found this useful "*if someone came up to you and said I'm getting bullied at school, you solve it or you could tell the principal or your Mum.*" (Year 9 girl)

Overall, these comments suggest that there were many strategies that the students found useful now in their teenage years and for the principal this could extend possibly into the future: "*Some of the lessons you learn five or six years ago suddenly become real at a later stage as their brain develops*".

Normalising the Strategies

The way the strategies became a normal part of the students' lives, rather than just part of a mental health support programme evolved as a key sub-theme.

One of the main parts of the programme involved the repetition of key aspects at the end of each session which seemed to help normalise the strategies due to the repetition of the ideas. These included being thankful, getting active, eating healthy, ensuring enough rest and sleep and helping in the environment. Furthermore, evidence from parents and educators reinforces this normalisation. One parent relates how times have changed and in their view male stereotypes are not as prominent as they once were as they discuss this normalisation.

Essentially, so kids don't go off the rails. Essentially some either go off the rails or become very sad youth who are not able to express themselves. As a mother of a boy and a girl, I can see that boys generally, even though there are not the same stereotypes in our fathers' generation, there are still the expectations that boys don't show their emotion as much as girls, and even though boys have mates they don't talk to them on the same level as girls do as much. I am quite keen for open discussions to happen to show him that it is the norm or should be the norm to talk about it when you are not feeling a 100 percent.

Getting the students to realise it's normal to have various feelings such as anxiety before events or on particular occasions was seen as a key part of the programme.

A teacher's view reinforces this belief.

The main skills is being able to recognise certain feelings and what certain feelings mean, so nervousness before an exam is anxiety and that is normal so how do we not let it be the boss of us, so to speak, so it gets them to regulate their feelings.

This teacher elaborates further, suggesting that this also helps those who are already slightly affected by anxiety. As some students may exhibit anxiety, this programme was seen to allow them to realise that their feelings were normal and offered help and advice to them such as what to do and where to go when in need.

The kids that have already been identified as suffering from minor anxiety issues, it helps them to realise that it is kind of normal and it's ok to talk about some of the issues they have. The main support strategy is getting them to feel like they are not the only ones that feel that way and first of all, help themselves and secondly, they are taught where to get help if they need help or have further issues they need help with. (Teacher)

At the beginning of the programme there is an obvious overall unease of sharing of the students' thoughts and feelings in general, as noted by class observations, however when observing a class that was half way through the programme when observations began, there was a more confident, normalised environment. A teacher also commented on this.

As the programme goes on they are definitely more confident in the way that they are able to express their ideas and not feel ashamed if they feel a certain

way or if they get upset, then it's ok to get upset or anxious about something and that its quite normal and that they can overcome it with some simple strategies. (Teacher)

One Year 9 girl in a focus group explained that:

It was hard to share with some people as you don't get on with some people in classes and some people might share stuff about you so you are worried about that. People saying things about you and it getting shared around.

However, another girl in this focus group commented that as the programme progressed the class were willing to share more,

because you realised that the people around you were pretty much going through the same thing as you, nervous about sharing it but in the end it was fine.

The focus group also commented that there was an 'unwritten rule' that developed as the programme progressed regarding privacy:

I don't think she [the teacher] really mentioned it but we all sort of just accepted it. (Year 9 girl)

I reckon we are just putting ourselves out there now and relying on other people. (Year 9 boy)

Further to this was the reaction to wanting to be interviewed by the researcher. The first group were half way through the programme when the class was asked for participants to be interviewed and many students were forthcoming in wanting to participate. However, the second group, having just started the programme were less forthcoming and took longer to decide to participate. Four did agree as part of a focus group, compared to six in the first group who wanted to participate in both the focus group and individual interviews.

Overall the educators believed this programme normalised being able to discuss how the students think and feel.

I definitely think the programme gives the kids the opportunity to understand that it's quite a normal way of thinking and you can help yourself. (Teacher)

I think the programme is part of a climate of being able to talk about things, so it's about promoting a climate that's broader than the programme but fits within that climate. (Guidance counsellor)

Development of Resilience

As the students moved through the programme it was evident that their development of resilience evolved over this time period, hence this became a sub-theme. The findings indicated that those supporting the child (e.g. teachers, parents) believed it was important to help them develop resiliency, and thought the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme contributed to this outcome. One parent noted that the students' need to look at themselves and ask inner questions. They believe that to do this, parents need to be able to allow children to sort things out on their own at times and not always want it sorted for them.

You have to put your hand up and say if things didn't go right, 'hey it didn't go right, how can I make it better?' and try to take a bit like, you know, breaking away from not expecting your parents or your teachers to stick up for you but fessing up basically, you know, just being brave enough to say 'this didn't work for me, how can I make it better?'. (Parent)

Similarly, another parent mentioned that it is about “*not wrapping them in cotton wool*”, but rather giving the students coping strategies. This parent also mentions motivation in this context as they believe that some things are too easy for them like the secondary school assessment system NCEA and state “*if kids know they have enough (credits) and then they do no more.*”

In addition, one parent believed that this development of resilience needed to be reinforced at home.

We still have to reinforce things a little bit at home, but I think he is still in that transition period at the moment. Sometimes he naturally does it and sometimes he needs to be reminded.

Another parent suggested that their child has learned coping strategies at an early age and uses a different coping strategy depending on the situation they are struggling with. For instance this parent stated their child would,

Do something quiet, like going away and reading a graphic novel or go to their room and quietly deal with that. Sometimes he will revert back to what he would do as a younger boy, so he would want to go see a mate and just hang out rather than with his boring parents. Sometimes if he is not in the right headspace he would like to just be with someone else really.

Another parent mentioned that their children developed resilience at an earlier age and gave examples of what they do in order to aid this development.

*He has always been pretty resilient in that he will just go back and do it again. If he doesn't get something he will just keep on coming back and that is something unique about him in that he will just keep giving it another go. He will say 'what do I need to work on or do differently?' and he will go give it another go. He doesn't take failure as a rejection but as a learning aspect where he says 'what am I going to do next time to make sure I succeed?'.
(Parent)*

Furthermore, parents discussed the positives of participating in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme.

It will definitely help him through the rest of school even University, which he has talked about going to which is good. (Parent)
*It is always good to reinforce as they can lose it over the smallest thing.
(Parent)*

Students have also discussed how the programme has aided their resilience as well as learned strategies to develop their resilience from outside of school.

Some things I did but some are just natural or I learnt at home. (Year 9 girl)
I learnt that from the programme, if you have bad thoughts share it, if you have good thoughts, share it as well. (Year 9 girl)
Sort of learned these from this programme. I learnt from other programmes outside school and I feel that I learned stuff there and I also learnt stuff here, it's intertwined. (Year 9 boy)

Parents reported a range of examples of how out-of-school interests helped develop their children's resilience as this taught them the benefit of not giving up, which contributes to their resilience.

He has a few battles like with music, he rips into new things well and never gives up. He has been thrown in the deep end at times and has battled through music pieces. He practised every day and tried and tried and eventually got there. There were times when he said 'I can't do it', but kept going and got there. (Parent)

The young person's self-esteem was seen as a precursor to resilience by all of the parents and educators involved. In their view, the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme further developed self esteem by introducing concepts such as confidence and assertiveness and enabled students to focus on aspects of their own life which they could feel good about.

It gets them to support them, to help yourself before others, teaching them assertiveness and confidence and highlighting some of the issues they may face. (Teacher)

It's huge [self esteem] and I don't think there are enough kids out there who believe that they can succeed. (Parent)

The principal discussed how complex it was for some families. Often both parents were, “having to work around the clock to just keep things going and therefore the parent-student involvement is not as high as it used to be”. This lack of involvement can also have an effect on a child's self-esteem. A teacher explains how students develop this self-esteem from the programme in various ways.

They definitely experience high levels of self-esteem and it starts with kids realising that they have many things to offer and that their skills are useful no matter what skills they have or what their strengths or weaknesses are, so firstly the programme has specially designed activities for them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and how they contribute to their family life, home life or school life, or whatever cultural activities they are involved in. It also gives them the opportunity to show their skills to their friends and see what their friends are doing or the people around them are doing so that they can see that they are unique and there is something that they can offer to other people. I think that's the first thing, the self-confidence and getting them to realise that no matter what, how they do at school, that them as people, how they contribute is quite important. (Teacher)

A concept taught through the programme which is aimed at helping develop students' self-esteem is ‘bucket filling’. This is when you say or do nice things to others. “A bucket dipper says or does mean things that make others feel bad” (Pg.15, McCloud). A specially designed book ‘Have you filled a bucket today’ covers this specifically. One teacher that was observed has read this to the students and done activities related to this. Students learned that this ‘bucket filling’ increases a students confidence as well as others because doing helpful chores, giving complements or providing support for others makes ourselves and others feel good. They also learn that ‘bucket dipping’ does the opposite.

We had our own buckets and people put nice words and things in them and they called that bucket filling. (Girl in mixed focus group)

The importance of early intervention or teaching the skills needed to develop resilience earlier has been noted as there are repercussions for not learning these skills such as needing help later on.

I know that with our older son, he missed that and he needed to actually get some counselling later which he has worked through and got some of those coping mechanisms. So I suppose it's about getting hold of it earlier and knowing that there are places you can go to talk to somebody if things are getting on top of you. (Parent)

Furthermore, students participating in the programme in the second half of the year commented that it would have been better participating in the programme earlier,

It would have been a lot more helpful starting the year with health for all classes or most of the classes because ending it at the end of the year you realise you have made a lot of mistakes you didn't have to make. (Year 9 girl)

Moreover, the school helps detect those students who need extra help with developing their resilience. For the principal, this might simply mean getting the students to 'do a scanning thing with the counsellors'.

One of the parts of the programme that is reinforced by staff and students is that you need to be able to be happy with yourself after you try your best.

What we are asking is that they do their best and be happy with that. (Principal)

If the outcome of something doesn't turn out that great then at least you have tried your best. (Student)

Furthermore, the programme also helps reinforce the belief of being positive or optimistic when things don't go our way, which helps develop resilience. As one student reported, it might mean "Definitely look at the bright side of things and maybe take my mind off it" (Year 9 boy). The principal shared a scenario of a school rugby defeat where even though the team was "gutted" after the loss a boy put it in perspective and said "the sun will rise and set".

School staff reported how the development of resilience is also related to how much opportunity a person has to further themselves and that students at the school have ample opportunity to do so.

I think compared to other schools, kids in this school - there is a lot of opportunity to become confident teenagers and to build or bounce back from adversity and so forth. I think through student leadership opportunities, kids

are given the opportunity to become more confident in who they are and what they are thinking. I guess for our mentoring programmes, the prefects, and I think staff are really good at helping kids through and giving them opportunities to pass and gain as many credits as they can. I think also how the timetable is structured, I think it gives them lots of opportunities to be in lots of different subjects and at different streaming levels so all kids are experiencing success and building confidence. (Teacher)

Finally, the principal discussed a visit by a professor of psychology who discussed the rise in narcissism in young people. The principal believes *'this programme seems to be the antidote to what seems to be a rise in narcissism among the younger generation.'*

Solution Focused

As students worked their way through the programme over two school terms, they developed a solution focused approach. Students reported how they started to believe or realise that there was alternative ways of dealing with their problems which showed they developed a change in mindset. One girl stated that *"there is always another way of thinking instead of thinking bad. There is something else you can think of"*, while another's comments were *"I learnt better ways to solve my problems, and I learnt that if I went through it, I would know how to solve it, doing it the right way rather than the wrong way"*. Similarly, a boy mentioned they could *"List the solutions and pick the best one"*. One benefit of finding solutions was that students also learned about controlling their anger or emotions as they started to begin to understand what frustrates them and can get others to help them find solutions.

Our teacher got us to write down on a piece of paper what made us angry and we put that in a hat and then we got the rest of the class to write a solution. (Year 9 girl)

To help youth deal with their problems in a better way, finding a solution, not being angry about it, not making other people angry just because you are angry. (Year 9 girl)

Therefore, this activity was developed to encourage the students to think about their problems or challenges in a different way, and perhaps to change their mindset to a more optimistic outlook. Once they moved their thoughts into a positive or solution-focussed mindset they were able to focus on starting to find solutions. They believed

the programme helped, *'Train people to think of solutions and try to pick the right one.'* (Year 9 boy), and *'To know solutions are out there and to try them'* (Year 9 boy). Students also mentioned that having learned about inner helpful thinking, especially challenging their unhelpful or negative thoughts, that this has helped them in finding solutions.

If you have like ...more than one orange thought you can just go through them until one works. (Year 9 boy)

Thinking of what you could do and at the end thinking of the right one.
(Year 9 girl)

Finally, the students believed it was important to equip teenagers with the solution-focussed strategies to allow them to move forward in the future and gave reasons why.

Because, maybe earlier on in life, they are finding it difficult to do things.
(Year 9 boy)

So they are on the top of their game and are happy to do school work. Because in the past solutions have gone wrong, or they have done it the wrong way and they can find solutions. (Year 9 boy)

It helps people get back on with their life. (Year 9 boy)

It teaches us about how to solve problems, with friends. (Year 9 girl)

How to come up with solutions, and think good thoughts. (Year 9 girl)

Implications for Teachers and Educators

The second major theme presents the results from the teachers and educators who made the programme 'happen' within this school context. The principal, teachers and the guidance counsellor within the school played different roles in the *MY FRIENDS Youth Resilience* programme. Each role contributed to the decision around programme implementation. This theme identifies what decisions were made around the programme and how these were identified and actioned. It analyses how decisions led to various adaptations of the programme that were implemented or possible future adaptations. It also analyses various implications and issues regarding timing and duration of the programme and aspects of programme training.

This is important as it allowed the identification of what has worked for teachers and educators in relation to the programme and what enables a greater likelihood for positive change for the future. Understanding aspects of programme

training as well as programme timing and duration were important so those educators could learn from what occurred and implement changes accordingly.

Programme adaptations (present and future)

The educators adapted parts of the programme or planned to adapt aspects of it in the future. These adaptations have occurred over the last few years [this is the school's third year participating in the programme] as the educators have become more familiar with the programme and realised it needs to be adapted to suit the New Zealand school context. The Group Leaders' Manual does recommend that teachers adapt the programme according to the needs of their class.

The teachers did not use the Group Leaders' Manual as much as the Student Activity Book, as it was seen as "too wordy" by one teacher. Another teacher stated:

I don't use the teacher manual very often, I did in the first year I taught it, but I found that it is easier to teach it from the student manual because I am on the same page number and activity as the kids and little things like that. In the first year I was going from one to the other but mainly now in the third year I have become more familiar to the programme so I just teach it to the student manual more.

Although the Student Activity Book was identified as being more useful than the teacher manual, educators identified the importance of adapting these. The guidance counsellor stated that it [the Group Leader's Manual] was 'a bit dense' and 'needs to be altered to fit the individual class that this teacher has. It provides good resources but it needs to be thought through pretty carefully and pruned a little... if they [teachers] went through the programme manual lesson by lesson it could become a bit dull and drawn out [for the student] so there was a feeling that it needed to be'. This was reiterated by teachers, in relation to the Student Activity Book:

There are too many blurbs, I don't think the kids actually read, I read them out to them so maybe more student/teenager friendly work where they are filling in the gaps or a bit more of that. They like having their own personal book but I think it could maybe be shaved or carved and maybe not as much reading, maybe more writing for kids, maybe more facts, they like facts, teenagers. (Teacher)

Another teacher "skipped a lot of the words, the wordiness and added activities."

The students also expressed that there was too much reading as one stated *‘Most of them were long, like, but she read most of it for us, but there was a lot of writing to read.’*

Teachers also discussed the need to skip parts of the programme depending on the needs of the students as one teacher stated *“I cut some things”* and *“I am quite good at speeding through some things I know they have understood or moved on from.”*

In contrast, the teachers identified that they add to the Student Activity Book to enhance what the programme was trying to teach.

There was a section on laughter so we did a deviation and did stuff about jokes and how jokes can be hurtful and what jokes were funny and did that.
(Teacher)

Where there is more writing , highlighting some ideas, I try and get them to do more verbal communication with their peers about some of the ideas because I think there is true benefits in feeding off each other and seeing how others deal with problems and learning that way as well. (Teacher)

I put in a few examples or scenarios that have actually happened in the school, so I adjust the scenario in the activity book, I change the scenario around so I actually say this is a scenario that has actually happened before, so putting a bit of truth behind the scenario. (Teacher)

One teacher that was observed included clips from movies to enhance the programme. One example was from the movie ‘Inside Out’ to help students understand five feelings which were anger, joy, sadness, fear and disgust. Another example was from ‘Angry Birds’ which was used to help students understand more about anger.

The Group Leaders’ Manual states that the programme should have two booster sessions after completion of the programme to *“review the steps of the FRIENDS plan in a fun and interesting way, and to prompt participants to continue using the skills they learnt in the MY FRIENDS program”* (Barrett, 2012, p.94). This manual explains that the first booster session is normally taught three to four weeks after session 10 and the second one usually eight weeks after the tenth session. However, the teachers involved were unable to do this due to time restraints. However, two teachers did manage to use the booster sessions with Year 10 students who completed the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme the year before, due to issues the classes were having.

I have used them with a year 10 class who were taught the programme in Year 9, as a teacher came to me and said he noticed that the kids were becoming quite negative in their school work or were putting themselves down and saying 'I can't do this' or 'I suck at this', or 'that's too hard, I'm going to fail,' so after the teacher approached me, I gave him some strategies and I also went in and taught some booster sessions to the class and that was quite interesting because I thought they would have forgotten but they were quite familiar with the concepts. (Teacher)

Some of them with some kids, I went into a class [to give booster sessions] that were having troubles. (Teacher)

However, one teacher expressed a desire to teach them more often, possibly differently from the recommendations of the programme booklet.

I think there is a purpose in using the booster sessions and it would be nice to teach them more regularly, but it doesn't have to be for a whole hour, it could be at the start of a lesson every now and then or once a week or something like that. The way the timetable at our school is structured there is not a lot of opportunity to teach booster sessions, as we have time restraints as I would have to go and teach the sessions. If the opportunity arises I will be more than happy to go and teach the sessions but as it stands there is no pre planned time slot for the kids to be taught the booster sessions.

Small adaptations have been made in regards to making the programme more culturally understood. One teacher expressed that, “because there is a lot of Australian lingo, I change some of it, because sometimes the kids say ‘what does that mean?’ and I say ‘it means this...’”. An example would be exchanging the word ‘chaplain’ to ‘counsellor’. This teacher also adapts the scenarios so they are more applicable and realistic to the students “so like, you are doing a real kiwi thing, like playing rugby or netball on the weekend, or you are going away on holiday to the beach”. The guidance counsellor noted that:

It was certainly something that someone mentioned to me and I could see some value in looking at it slightly from a cultural lens and making some adjustments but I'm not sure what adjustments are being made. I think the teachers who have taught it now for a couple of years have already made some adaptations in the way they teach it and I think probably from that there would be some value in getting all the teachers together to kind of doing some

processing around how its taught, what's good and not so good in terms of that experience.

Moreover, looking towards the future, teachers have commented on adapting this programme to integrate other aspects of the health curriculum.

What I am hoping to do this time is to tie what is in here, in with drugs and sex and those sorts of things. I don't want to teach them separately, but teach them as part of the plan with the skills, because when I look at it, this book is actually teaching them how to deal with sex and drugs and issues.

One teacher discussed the inclusion of more cultural aspects to integrate with the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme as they stated “*there is no hauora at all in this and while I didn't manage to get it in last time I am going to get it in this time*”. Hauora is a specialised New Zealand Māori health philosophy which incorporates four dimensions of wellbeing. These are physical, mental and emotional, social and spiritual (Wikipedia).

Finally, parents and teachers commented on aspects to include at the conclusion of the programme. One parent mentioned that the students could bring home something to help reinforce the strategies learned.

I guess if I had prompts at the end of the programme or if something was brought home, not so much a survey but maybe some questions to think about, then I think that would probably reinforce things in another environment but nothing came home so nothing was discussed. (Parent)

Similarly, a teacher discussed possible surveys or investigating the way students used the Student Activity Book.

I think through surveying is one way, so through directly asking them, but then it's also whether they are consciously thinking about how these skills have improved or are these skills just improving because they are practising or are they just automatic. I think obviously doing a little bit of research into how they are answering the questions in the books or how they are answering the questions in the class and check they have understood or used the strategies.

Programme Timing and duration

Various time related aspects as well as programme duration emerged as a key sub-theme. Time restraints were identified as something that the teachers at this school saw as challenging. They believed that there was not enough time to teach

everything to a level that they would like to have:

Positive self talk or inner helpful thoughts. I think they still need more practice on that. I spent about three lessons on that because of time restraints but I think there should be more and should be more avenues to hone in on that a bit more. (Teacher)

One teacher also believed that there were aspects students needed more practice on.

It would be nice to have the freedom to spend longer on some things. I am quite good at speeding through some things I know they have understood or moved on from but some of the things I think is worth tapping into a bit more, the timing doesn't allow you to. (Teacher)

This teacher believed that “the way or the timing...puts on a bit of pressure” and also that “I don't like to teach something and leave it if I know they haven't understood it, as I don't think there is any purpose in that, just for the sake of teaching it”. (Teacher)

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, this lack of time was a factor in the classes not participating in the booster sessions as one teacher mentioned “we just don't have time”. Another teacher couldn't see their class using the booster sessions in the future “totally because of time”.

Another aspect of the programme timing was the lesson length, which was seen as an area of contention. The Group Leaders' Manual recommends that the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme “ranges from half an hour to an hour twice a week across two school terms, preferably terms 2 and 3” (Barrett, 2012b, p. 11). However, this school's timetable was restricted in that the students took health in either the first half of the year or the second half, for one hour each week. One teacher expressed the view that the length was problematic.

I think lesson length is an issue to a degree, we have an hour so I think in saying that it's also enough as you start to lose the engagement of the kids. I think only teaching them once a week is a major issue and that's because the kids have completely forgotten what you have taught them the week before, normal human behaviour so that's natural. I don't know what the answer to that is, do we teach it, or some of the skills in an integrated approach, do we teach it with subject areas or do we teach the programme every day or for a certain period of time, but I definitely think it's an issue or a barrier to their learning if we only teach it once a week.

When observing the class the researcher noted that the class missed the lesson if the

class fell on a holiday, teacher only day, or if the teacher was away. This was because a reliever could not teach the programme for fidelity reasons as they had not been through the training.

Similarly, programme duration was identified as problematic. This was because it consumed all the time that health was allocated for the year.

We have only got 18 periods of health in total for year 9 and 10 so it pinches basically all my teaching time which would normally go, which every other school is giving, to subject health. (Teacher)

This teacher expressed the concern this led to in later years when students were learning health at college, as they have not done subject health.

We are at a massive disadvantage though because we can't teach the basics of that programme.

Teacher training to facilitate the programme

The specialised training the teachers engage with to be able to teach the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme became a sub-theme of 'implications for teachers and educators.'

The initial training the school was involved in was seen as unsuccessful and some staff left early and never completed the second day as a result of this. The principal stated that the school "*started behind the eight ball because of that*" as "*the initial training wasn't flash*". One teacher reiterated this feeling of disapproval as they said "*it was ordinary, a large number pulled out*". Another teacher also expressed her unhappiness with the initial training.

I hated it, I was at the training that didn't work. I felt incredibly uncomfortable. Schools were really negative about it there. Between one day and the next day schools pulled out altogether. I was the only one left from our school, they all left and made excuses, said it was useless. Gave up on it. It was, I hated it, but the principal wanted us to trial it. I made the guarantee to trial it even though I had incredibly negative feelings. I gather from the others that if I had gone again then I would have felt differently. Because there was a different feeling, different trainers. Our trainers didn't know what they were doing and they treated us like babies, it wasn't good. (Teacher)

However, as noted above, the teacher training that was provided by the MoE facilitators in the second year was significantly different as it was described as "*first*

class” by one teacher. The principal saw it as “more practical based and helpful and that sort of thing” and elaborated on this, “I can’t speak high enough about the trainers we have now”. The guidance counsellor also commented that “the quality of the trainers makes a lot of difference, in terms of the energy and the enthusiasm they bring to it.”

Furthermore, one teacher discussed how the training was able to bring forth the *“importance of the programme”*. They described the training as *“crucial”* because *“that’s where you get to understand the importance or purposefulness or the reasoning behind the strategy, for a lot of people I speak to they don’t understand the benefits or real necessities or the why behind it.”* This teacher also explained that this programme has professional standing behind it and that this training *“helped you understand these are strategies that are taken from trained psychologists”*.

Enhancing School Community

The third major theme arising through the results centred on community links and showed the implications for the programme did not rest purely within the school context, but had wider implications. The *MY FRIENDS Youth Resilience* programme had additional outcomes in terms of enhancing school community, so although the programme’s intention is directed at supporting learners themselves, there were other consequences of the implementation. The results show positive programme aspects that interact to build a positive school community in relation to the programme including: the development of relationships between students, their friends and families and school personal; the environment where the strategy is used and aspects students valued most about the programme.

The importance of observing the school community’s actions in order to strengthen student wellbeing is vital to understand, as is how the development of these relationships evolved and ways in which it can be developed further. Observing the environment where the strategy is used enables one to understand the logic or meaning behind the various strategies the students use and how those involved can learn from this in the future. Finally, understanding what aspects of the programme that students’ value is important because this can also show what strategies work more effectively in supporting learners work through the programme.

Development of Relationships

One sub-theme of ‘enhancing school community’ was the development of relationships that occurred as a result of the programme. These were strengthened over time between the students, their families, friends and school personnel.

Many relationships at home were reported by family members to have developed positively over the course of the programme. One Year 9 girl commented that her *“attitude towards others has changed a bit. Maybe helping more people than I usually do”*. She also mentioned that her Mum said *“your attitude has got better since you have started back at college”*. Another girl said she had learned to *“tell my Mum when I am getting angry”*. Similarly, a Year 9 boy discussed how he had started taking the initiative at home in helping develop their relationship with their mother:

Everyone else goes through the same things, like everything doesn’t always revolve around you, like when I get home from school, I’m really tired and don’t want to do the dishes because it’s a full pile, because my Mum gets really angry when there is a full pile, and I thought that she would have had a hard day at work and I had a hard day at school so I just do the dishes.

The parent of this child also commented that the relationship at home had developed more positively, *“I would say the walking away from a situation rather than standing there and arguing with Mum”*.

The development of relationships at home was not confined to the students and their parents, but also progressed to their siblings. The principal commented that *“One Samoan Year 9 boy said he was able to help his University brother through the ideas he had learnt through the programme, which I thought was pretty neat”*. Moreover, a parent expressed how her son has dealt with things more positively with his sister:

He has a younger sister who often winds him up and he has expressed that at times he has felt like hitting her and he has had to channel that anger and he has walked away and he has been supported with that as that has been the best thing for him. This is something he has obviously had a battle with.

Students themselves have also mentioned how they have seen the relationships with their siblings improve.

My sister was arguing with me and I just left the room, and she was confused, and it worked as we had time to calm down and then we had time to discuss it and thought about how we could make it better for both of us. (Year 9 girl)
My brother has definitely seen the change in me, he has seen a lot better

change, as I am more relaxed at home and I can focus on my stuff more than what I used to be able to. (Year 9 girl)

Furthermore, this girl commented that she has shared what she has learned with her brother, *“I have mentioned bits of pieces of what I have learnt, like the traffic lights. Mainly I talk about it with my brother because things between my brother are not always good so it is good to talk to him when I can.”*

The development of friendships has also become apparent, seen by students and parents. One Year 9 boy commented that as a result of the programme he met new friends, *“The walking away thing, all of our devices were taken away from us and I couldn’t contact my friends and hang out so I went for a walk and met new people. It was cool.”* This boy’s parent discussed that their son talked about what friends are good for him.

It may have been why he was really keen to catch up with his mates on the weekend and in the holidays as he was really keen to catch up with them and touch base with them and hang out with them. He has made mention about which friends are good friends so this may be from what you guys have talked about in the programme. I know he wants to go to youth group tonight as he mentioned that this morning as he missed that recently as there is a good group there.

This was a key part of the programme as the students were observed by the researcher working on session 3 where they discussed what friends are good for them and did activities around this. The Group Leaders’ Manual states,

The aim of this activity was to encourage participants to think about the ways they can be their own friend, and how and when to recognise that a friendship may be positive, fun or healthy and bring out the best in them, or when it may be damaging and self destructive (Barrett, 2012, p.38).

In addition, a teacher at this school discussed how the relationships in their class have improved.

They even said it made them aware of what’s upstairs, it made them aware of others. They started off at our health programme pushing and shoving and the playfight stuff, that disappeared. Relationship stuff between students got better, you noticed it in the class. Things were definitely more noticeable. (Teacher)

The principal adds that it is *“just a great programme for listening to others, hearing what others have said and allowing students their voice in a way that’s quite cleverly*

written.” Additionally, the principal states that the health and wellbeing data backs this up and gives examples.

‘At school I’m taught it is ok to be different from other students’, 235 said agree or strongly agree compared to 37 that didn’t agree which when you compare this nationally there is quite a difference. That’s Year 10 kids that had been through the programme. You will see there is enough data in there to show an absolute significant difference in where we stand. ‘Behaviours like hitting or bullying are not ok at school’, 17 disagree, 277 agree or strongly disagree, and nationally this is quite considerably different. ‘At school we are encouraged to get on with students from different cultures or backgrounds’, look at the difference there, teachers get on well etcetera. There is a degree of understanding that that’s all about respectful relationships. You can’t say that all this Year 10 data is a result of the programme but there is something we are doing right at this school as that is quite a big difference.

Moreover, the relationships between the students’ and their teachers shows further evidence of this development. Students in two classes the researcher observed seemed to have developed positive relationships with their teacher and many stated that their teacher really tried to help them. Comments from boys and girls reinforced this. One boy mentioned, *“She is just a really nice teacher... I think she just understands us, when she was young, she just knows how to put herself in our shoes.”* Likewise, a Year 9 girl stated, *“I liked how our teacher was involved in the work. She was engaged in the work. She was participating. She was a part of it too and not just standing up the front, like most teachers say, ok, you are doing this now. She was like, doing it as well sort of thing.”*

Furthermore, this development of relationships has been extended to include the school and the parents. The principal discussed that the school ran a parent information evening which was run by a training facilitator. In regards to the parents, the principal stated that *“they couldn’t speak high enough about the value of the programme because the facilitator took them through a particular exercise activity, the bucket book analogy. They were just blown over by it and wished they had something like it when they were at school.”* In addition, the guidance counsellor reiterated that the parents were positive about the programme during the parents evening, *“The parents were very enthusiastic at that meeting, and I think there was a recognition that the programme was valuable and was one they would be happy to*

see in the school". A teacher mentioned that students have said they have discussed the programme at home and also that parents have discussed the programme at parent-teacher evenings where the parents have identified the "*usefulness*" of it and "*feel like they want to know more about it*". Additionally, another teacher explains more about the communication between the school and the parents:

We sent the letter home, we have parents meetings and some of them came to me there and I talked to some of them about the programme and what we do and why. Some ring me up and ask me about it because it says on the letter that you can do so, some emailed me and asked about what we do, not just the friends programme but what else we do.

This shows that according to this teacher, this communication leads to further discussions between the school and the parents about what the school does in health, which seems to add to the development of relationships. However, there seemed to be a possible breakdown in communication over the *MY FRIENDS Youth* parent information evening, as even though some parents heard about it, one parent the researcher talked to hadn't, "*If I would be pedalling this I would have had a parents evening as you could say to them [their child], hey remember what the programme said if you are getting stressed? Remember that.*"

Environment Where Strategy Used

Another sub-theme which emerged was the environment where the strategy was used. There were several contexts and settings where students, parents and school staff felt these strategies were used. These mainly consisted of the school context, with friends, at home, on the sports field and in the community.

Students were able to use and transfer the strategies and skills learned at school in various ways. One teacher mentioned "*students use them to problem solve and plan when things are due and identifying some coping steps to achieve the goal.*" Another teacher commented that the students use the strategies in class and that in doing so they are also using the "*terminology*". Students have also commented that they use the strategies at school when they discussed how they planned a speech by using a coping step plan. One student communicated that they used the strategies learned when having issues with friends at school. They decided not to be friends anymore, but were positive about it, "*because I lost one of my good friends, I wanted*

to be angry but I just didn't let it get to me. I just thought oh well, wasn't meant to be."
(Year 9 girl)

Moreover, related to this is how students use the strategies in school sports teams or weekend sports teams. The principal mentioned that students use them when decisions don't go their way:

a young man on the field went up to head a ball and the goalie punched him, but he didn't do anything about it. He didn't moan about the injustice but got up, got stuck in, and put the referee out of the equation and scored a hatrick.

Further to this, a teacher spoke of how students in their class had:

identified using the skills in a sporting sense, so if they are kicking a conversion or setting themselves for a try and they are having the self-confidence to believe that they can do it and believe in themselves so the inner helpful thinking.

Students gave examples of how they used the strategies they had learned on the sports field.

In sports, at netball there is a girl that always makes us angry and we want to try and stay calm, and there is this thing we use like good sportsmanship or something like that and we want to keep our temper, until the end of the game and that is when we let it all out on our last quarter. (Year 9 girl)

Sports for challenges, because I get angry because maybe we are losing by far and I just have to relax and think that we are going to win. (Year 9 girl)

*Sports games... At my volleyball game the other team was cheating and the umpires were quite biased because they were coaches from the other school, year 13's, and I thought helpful thoughts, just to be, like, 'that's not my problem, it's theirs and that it's not like life and death if we lose this game'".
(Year 9 girl)*

One Year 9 boy discussed a dilemma he had when he had a clash of events, including sports' practice which eventuated in a positive outcome as a result of using strategies he had learned.

It was like when I have rugby practices on Monday and Wednesday and singing/band on the other days so have no spare time and one day they changed the Monday to Tuesday and the Wednesday to Thursday and I had stuff on those days and they were real important so I was real sad because I couldn't make it to those trainings because it was a trial week. So I changed it

[my thoughts] to things like talking to the people and saying I couldn't do it and also I had a spare Wednesday and I never have that so I could hang out with some friends which I don't really get to do.

Another environment where students use the strategies they have learned is in the community. One student mentioned that *"for homework we think about the things we are thankful for or how we can help out in our community."* A parent also mentioned their child uses the strategies while doing their homework as well as helping out in the community.

He does a lot of work with me with Mary Potter, on Saturdays, repairs and maintenance. He will come up with a way to fix things. He rarely gets frustrated by it, so he uses his, he is a pleasure to work with and is motoring, he is a fast thinker, uses his time wisely once he is engaged.

In addition, another student stated *"the ideas were helpful, I could use them in life, in a bad situation"*. (Year 9 girl)

Overall, it is evident that the students, parents and educators all believe that the strategies can be used in various areas of life and these examples above confirm this.

Aspects of the Programme the Students Valued

A sub-theme of 'building school community' was aspects of the programme that the students valued. These included facets of the Student Activity Book, discussions in class, diversity of the programme, how the programme enabled students to help themselves and several others.

Facets of the Student Activity Book were valued by the students in various ways. Girls liked to see examples of situations they had to discuss. One Year 9 girl commented that:

just seeing how they have written the scenarios, how they have written it in the book, because sometimes it is hard to understand what the teacher is telling you so it is good to have a booklet so you can see how they have written it.

Similarly, another girl commented that they liked the manual:

To hold all your thoughts and hold all the information so if you need to go back to it you can and it is not always us writing, as it is not always fun to write during a lesson. It is good to have it already written down, easy to access.

Other girls stated, *“It was good to write in the gaps if they had the questions”* and *“Just filling in the gaps in the book.”* Other students enjoyed the way the student manual helped them, *“It was good how they gave examples of a situation”* (Year 9 boy), and *“If you didn’t understand the question it was good for them to break it down”* (Year 9 girl). One Year 9 boy explained how they enjoyed how the acronym helped him remember the different strategies. Students also *“liked the little pictures”* (Year 9 boy), and *“colouring them in”* (Year 9 girl). It was mentioned however that some didn’t enjoy writing in it as much, but several students agreed to the statement a Year 9 boy made when he said he did *“prefer over writing in another book”*. A teacher of another class claimed that their students *“don’t like the booklet”* but rather *“like the activities they do around the booklet”*.

A major aspect of what students valued was the discussions. First, they valued hearing other people’s points of view, as a teacher points out.

I think they enjoyed being able to hear other people’s stories and being able to identify with other people. Obviously the nature of health is a unique subject in that it’s really the only subject where kids get to talk about themselves as an individual and themselves within their family and themselves within their school-life, so I think that the kids really enjoy hearing about how others feel a certain way as well and hearing about how other people deal with problems in their life or situations which are potential challenges. (Teacher)

The students also enjoyed sharing aspects of their own life. One Year 9 boy commented that, *“I just like telling people about my life... what I have done with my sisters and stuff.”* Similarly, a teacher stated *“they like to be able to share a situation”*. Related to this is how students enjoyed sharing positive aspects of their life as well as things they need to work on, *“I think kids like that they are given the opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses and identify what skills they are confident with”*. (Teacher)

Furthermore, the students enjoyed solving each others problems. A Year 9 girl gives an example, *“the hat thing, when people had a problem and someone else wrote a solution”*. In addition a teacher explained they *“enjoy being able to solve other peoples problems and give other people advice and come up with strategies. They like being able to share a situation and share how they can help others”*. Overall, many boys and girls commented that they really valued discussions around various scenarios. Typical comments were *“I really liked the discussions”* (Year 9 boy), or

“scenarios, because it is like something that will probably happen” (Year 9 girl). One Year 9 boy commented that he enjoyed to, “talk in groups and how it’s not hard. You don’t have to use lots of energy to do it [the programme]”. Interestingly, a girl mentioned comparing the discussions to the Student Activity Book, “If you look back to the books not many people would have it completed, but if you go back to the discussions and when we talked about it, I felt most of us got that done rather than the bookwork.” The guidance counsellor also commented on discussions, “I think they enjoyed talking with one another”.

Moreover, girls mentioned other aspects that they valued were learning various strategies to help them in their lives. One commented, *“getting to know better ways”* and another mentioned, *“I really enjoyed learning about the bits how we can help ourselves”*.

Students commented on several other areas that they valued such as feedback from the teacher, *“I liked it when the teacher gives good feedback about us” (Year 9 boy)*. Others commented that they valued the way the seating plan was as it helped them be more open to sharing their comments, *“I liked it how you could sit where you wanted as I wouldn’t have shared as much with people if I didn’t know them that much” (Year 9 boy)*. Students also valued the diversity the programme offered as one Year 9 girl’s comment suggests, *“The mix of drawing, writing, thinking, acting.”* This diversity was evident in classroom observations also as noted by the researcher. Overall, the students have valued many aspects of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme and their views as well as those of the teachers and parents have confirmed this.

Summary

The analysis of the data saw three major themes emerge in this result section. These were ‘student centred outcomes’, ‘implications for teachers and educators’ and ‘enhancing school community’. Each theme was further broken down via various subthemes.

The theme of ‘student centred outcomes’ saw five sub-themes emerge. These were ‘the strategies covered through F.R.I.E.N.D.S’, ‘which strategies were seen as most useful’, and also ‘how these strategies became normalised’ as part of the students lives. Finally, ‘the development of resilience’ and how students developed a

‘solution-focused’ approach became the final sub-themes. The second major theme, ‘implications for teachers and educators’ saw three sub-themes emerge. These were ‘programme adaptations (present and future)’, ‘programme timing and duration’ and finally ‘teacher training to facilitate the programme’. The third major theme of ‘enhancing school community’ saw three sub-themes emerge. Firstly, the ‘development of relationships’ as a result of the programme was described, followed by the ‘environment where the strategies were used’. ‘Aspects of the programme the students valued’ became the final sub-theme which helped show how the programme enhanced the school community.

Overall, results indicated that the programme was positive and enjoyable for the students and their community and with various adaptations it could continue to enable others to learn strategies to aid their development of resilience.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study has focused on an in-depth analysis of how the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme was enacted within a secondary school. The aims of the programme are to provide strategies to improve resilience in young people as well as increase their self esteem and in doing so reduce or prevent anxiety and depression. The experiences of teachers and students within this school showed that these broad aims were met, and is consistent with the findings of international studies (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001; Liddle & Macmillan, 2010; Stallard et al., 2005). Young people in this study discussed ways in which they learned strategies to understand and deal with their day-to-day problems which has seemed to help address their feelings of anxiety, and generally ‘cope’ better in their everyday life. Several international studies have shown reductions in anxiety in young people after participating in the *FRIENDS* programmes (Essau et al., 2012; Mostert & Loxton, 2008; Stallard et al., 2005) as well as reductions in depressive symptoms (Essau et al., 2012; Lowry-Webster et al., 2003).

The results of this study demonstrated that staff, students and parents believed the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme was positive and enjoyable and enabled the participating young people to develop various skills and strategies which contributed to their development of resilience. Three key themes evolved from the thematic analysis. These were around (1) student centred outcomes, (2) implications for teachers and educators and (3) enhancing school community.

In this chapter these themes will be explored in a holistic way through exploring the programme effectiveness, the changes made to the programme, and sustainability issues. The first section will focus on the programme’s effectiveness. The potential of the programme including what works and why will be explored. The second section focuses on how the school created the most effective environment for change to happen. It will discuss what adaptations and other aspects were put in place in order for the programme to be effective. The final section discusses the sustainability of the programme longer term. Finally, limitations of the study are discussed.

Programme effectiveness

The data from this study show that the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme and *FRIENDS for Life* are effective in many areas relating to increasing resilience for children and youth in New Zealand. Internationally, similar findings were identified (Davidson, 2011; Henefer & Rodgers, 2013; Liddle & Macmillan, 2010).

Ahlen and colleagues (2012) stated that Swedish students who had participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme had a significant increase in the knowledge of their feelings and 98% of their participants reported this by means of a social validity questionnaire. Similarly, in a small New Zealand sample, Sheerin (2014) found Year 9–10 students who had participated in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme were able to learn to relax and control their emotions. In a study of 10 girls (aged 9–10) from a Mexican orphanage (Gallegos et al., 2012) stated that the girls found the relaxation exercises useful as well as learning how to acknowledge their feelings, as seen by the results of Barrett’s (2005) Social Validity Questionnaire for Children. Their study found the most useful strategies to be the coping step plans and changing negative thoughts into positive, helpful ones. The current New Zealand study also showed these strategies as being most useful, therefore suggesting these strategies are internationally useful for young people. Once students understand more about their feelings, they then have more power to control them. The Student Activity Book states “we can identify our feelings early while their intensity is low and take steps to control and regulate them while they are still manageable” (Barrett, 2012a, p. 8).

In a study of Canadian students from two classes, Rose and colleagues (2009) showed that 44% who completed the *FRIENDS for Life* programme found controlling their inner thoughts most useful, followed by coping step plans and learning to problem solve. This aligns with the current study as ‘solution focused’ evolved as a sub-theme of ‘student centred outcomes’. This shows that students believe that mastering their negative, unhelpful thoughts is a way to enable them to move forward and find solutions or cope with difficulties they have in a positive way.

The current study identified the way students were able to look on the bright side of things; a point consistent with an earlier New Zealand national evaluation (MacDonald et al., 2015; Sheerin, 2014). As Sheerin (2014) noted, students stated they were “learning to appreciate positive aspects of life” (p. 20). In an Australian study, Barrett, Sonderegger et al. (2001) found their participants exhibited a more

positive outlook than control participants. This was measured by two scales: the Kazdin and Beck Hopelessness Scales (KHS and BHS). The former is used with primary students and the latter with older students, both with the aim of measuring pessimistic expectations. Similarly, Gallegos and colleagues (2012) found that Mexican girls from an orphanage in their study showed positive increases in relation to the girls' hope as measured by the Children's Hope Scale. These findings suggest that similar to the current study, students are able to increase their optimism possibly due to them focussing on, or realising, the positive things that are in their lives. Activities which could have contributed to this were most likely taken from session five of the programme as the aims of this session were to understand positive self-talk, learn that there are different ways of thinking about the same situation and changing negative thoughts into positive ones.

Furthermore, there was evidence that the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme filled a gap in the students' needs at the school in the current study. When students start secondary school at Year 9 (typically 13 years old), there are a lot of issues that they are presented with which the programme enables them to deal with by providing appropriate strategies. One of these needs in particular is having sufficient social skills in order to meet friends, be co-operative as well as deal with conflict with others appropriately. Henefer and Rodgers (2013) found that students in their Irish study showed a significant decrease in peer difficulties after participation in the *FRIENDS For Life* programme. Related to this, Liddle and Macmillan (2010) found in their study of Scottish students that there were considerable improvements in social skills after participation in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. Teachers and students rated this after the programme and it was measured using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). These results, in conjunction with those of the current study show that students have improved in their ability to get on with others better and suggests skills learned in sessions three and nine of the Student Activity Book could have contributed to this. These include the strategies of (CALM), leadership skills in peacemaking, managing bullying, understanding confidence and how to increase it as well as learning important aspects of friendships.

Educators, students and parents of the participating school in this study were aware of the aims of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme, which were to provide skills and strategies to enable students to deal with various challenges in the

students' lives more effectively. This is relevant as the Group Leaders' Manual states that it is important for educators to ensure the aims of the programme are known. Sykes (2009) also saw positive results in her study when the students all understood the aims of the programme. This is important because research has shown that when students have goals or understand what it is they are trying to achieve they perform better, enjoy tasks more and have higher efficiency (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009).

The Group Leaders' Manual states that learning is best for young people when they are active and when it is *fun*. Students in this study showed that they enjoyed numerous aspects of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme, as did students in several other studies. Barrett, Sonderegger et al. (2001) found 77% of non-English-speaking background treatment participants rated the programme as fun, and all treatment groups enjoyed the programme, however, they mentioned there were differences among different migrant groups as to which activities the participants enjoyed the most. Short and colleagues (2001) found 83% of *FRIENDS* participants found it fun, while Davidson (2011) found that overall, English students enjoyed the *FRIENDS for Life* programme and found it valuable in her study of seven schools, who used the programme either as a whole class or a small group. Similarly, Ahlen and colleagues (2012) stated that 98% of Swedish participants enjoyed the programme. Therefore this shows that students value the programme and the activities they do. This was evident in the current study through document analysis and the student interviews. This implies that the programme has universal appeal in terms of the enjoyment students' experience. This has important implications because in New Zealand, if students are not enjoying what they are learning, then they are more likely to become disinterested, not engage fully and may not want to participate. Barrett (2012b) reiterates this as she states students learn best when they are having fun. Students in this study whom were observed and interviewed seemed to fully participate with activities in the programme.

Not surprisingly then, all students interviewed in the current study would recommend the programme to other Year 9 students in the future, and parents and staff also commented on the value of the programme in this regard. Several other studies discussed earlier stated that students rated the programme as positive or liked it (Barrett, Short, et al., 2001; Rose et al., 2009; Short et al., 2001; Stallard et al., 2005) and would recommend the programme. The recommendations ranged from 75

to 100% (Stallard et al., 2005; Sykes, 2009) with parent recommendations being over 90% (Barrett, Short, et al., 2001; Short et al., 2001). This showed that overall there is a definite positive feeling of the programme's effectiveness. This has important implications because peer opinion is important to students in New Zealand and they are more likely to engage with something that their friends have recommended, especially those a year older who would have done the programme the year earlier.

As shown earlier, students, staff and parents in this current study discussed how the development of resilience evolved as the students progressed through the programme. It was evident that the skills they learned aided this process, and that it was important they could practise these over time, and across context (e.g. at home and school). Given resilience is an important skill to enable students to participate fully in many parts of society, this is an important outcome of the programme. When students are resilient they are more willing to play sports or try new things and in New Zealand these are some of the main ways friendships are developed, which are vital for helping students in challenging times (Barrett, 2012b).

Related to this, both the parents and teachers in this study identified the increase of self-esteem in the young people. Self-esteem is clearly an outcome in other studies, which suggests a link between the programme and this outcome. For example, Liddle and Macmillan (2010) noted considerable improvements in self-esteem in Scottish students after participation in the programme, which was maintained for four months. Another study saw an increase in self-esteem in primary students participating in the *FRIENDS* programme, however, this was not evident in secondary students (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001). An increase in self-esteem was also shown across contexts, so it was not just school specific. Given both parents and teachers in the present study identified this outcome, it is worth further consideration. For example, the study involving young girls living in a Mexican orphanage part-time showed evidence of an increase in their 'self esteem at home' and 'with peers' after participating in the Spanish version of the *FRIENDS* programme (Gallegos et al., 2012). Stallard and colleagues (2005) also noted that self-esteem increased (as measured by the Culture Free Self-Esteem Questionnaire Form B, which measures general self-esteem with sub-scales in social, academic and parental self-esteem) significantly three months after English students participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. A follow up to this study saw that this increase in self-esteem was maintained 12 months after completion of the *FRIENDS for Life* programme (Stallard

et al., 2008). While it has not been possible to do a follow-up of the current study at this stage, it would be interesting to know whether the students' increase in self-esteem was maintained. It is possible it may be maintained, as there was a significant increase in children's self-esteem in a study in England (Stallard et al., 2007) three months after participants completed the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. These findings are particularly important, as there is a link between self-esteem and resilience as mentioned earlier. Also, of significance is the dip of self-esteem in some students as they enter college (Siedman et al., 1994, cited in Shafer, 1996). This is because of various reasons such as a change in school and teachers, losing friends and challenges of puberty, therefore it is imperative students have the ability to overcome these challenges and having higher self-esteem can aid this process.

The Group Leaders' Manual states that the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme helps prevent anxiety and helps young people to normalise this feeling and in doing so teaches strategies to help young people deal with anxiety related situations. In this study 'normalising the strategies' became a sub theme of 'student centred outcomes' as staff, students and parents all identified it was valuable that the programme normalised strategies to help reduce anxiety in students. Similarly, in another study, several teachers mentioned how the programme normalised the students' anxious feelings as it enabled the students to be more willing to share their feelings (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013). Sykes (2009) noted this also in her study of English teenagers. This must be a relief for students because often they are worried about things no-one notices or cares about, or that are just a normal part of life that everyone goes through.

Furthermore, students in the current study were able to use the strategies they learned to help reduce their anxious feelings. Reductions in anxiety were seen in several other studies such as those in England (Stallard et al., 2005; Sykes, 2009), Australia (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001), Germany (Essau et al., 2012) and Hong Kong (Batra, 2013). This suggests many of the strategies taught in the three *FRIENDS* programmes would have most likely aided this process, such as exploring solutions and building support teams.

Even though there was no follow-up study planned for this current study, it would be interesting to note the students' perception of how useful the strategies were in reducing anxious feelings after a period of time. Several studies have showed reductions in anxiety several months after, for example, in South Africa (Mostert &

Loxton, 2008), England (Stallard et al., 2007) and also a year later in England (Stallard et al., 2014).

Related to these findings were those of McLoone and colleagues (2006) who reviewed three treatment programmes (aimed at treating disorders, in this case two to treat anxiety and one to treat social phobias), one of which was *FRIENDS*. They stated that 50-80% of children who participated in CBT programmes no longer had an anxiety diagnosis after treatment.

Students and staff in the current study mentioned that the students were able to use the strategies learned to enable them to deal with the issues they faced, as well as feeling happy with themselves after they had tried their best. Interestingly, German students, (Essau et al., 2012) who participated in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme showed less cognitive avoidance and decreased perfectionism. This is important because these two aspects are related to students who have high anxiety, so it is desirable to reduce these in those students.

Barrett (2012) discussed the relationship between anxiety levels and depression, and identified depression as secondary to anxiety. Therefore, as discussed the *FRIENDS for Life* and *MY FRIENDS Youth* programmes can reduce anxiety in those who have participated in them and it is important for anxiety levels to be kept in check or reduced quickly when levels get too high. It is also important to reduce an individual's depressive state as soon as possible because otherwise this may lead to various issues such social problems, aggression, and be withdrawn or self-destructive (Achenbach, 1991, cited in Petersen et al., 1993). This current study showed how students were able to find strategies to help them cope when they faced difficulties or challenges, which could have resulted in depressed moods if it went unchecked.

Several studies showed reductions in symptoms of depression and reduced risk of developing depression after participation in the *FRIENDS* programmes such as in Mexico (Gallegos et al., 2013), Germany (Essau et al., 2012), Sweden (Ahlen et al., 2012) and Australia (Lowry-Webster et al., 2003). Several strategies from the programme most likely contributed to these studies' results such as how students are able to learn mindfulness techniques, challenge their unhelpful thoughts and replace them with positive ones, rewarding oneself and connecting with others.

The *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme can be integrated into the school curriculum easily as teachers in the current study found when they integrated it into the health and P.E curriculum. Other New Zealand teachers within the national

evaluation also noted this (MacDonald et al., 2015). Henefer and Rodgers (2013) found teachers in their study could integrate the *FRIENDS for Life* programme into the Irish curriculum, however several adaptations were necessary. Moreover Lowry-Webster and colleagues (2003) noted that the *FRIENDS* programme was seen to complement the Australian curriculum by nearly 78% of the 17 teachers who were studied. This is significant because other teachers in New Zealand wishing to implement the programme will be more likely to do so if it can be integrated easily.

The new language gained by the students in this study was apparent as seen by parents, students and the staff at the school. Being able to express feelings in a positive manner was a key part of the programme. It was clear that students were able to use the colours in exchange for types of thoughts such as red, green and orange thoughts. Furthermore, Henefer and Rodgers (2013) discussed how boys in their study got to learn new language to express the issues they were facing and parents mentioned about the greater vocabulary gained for expression. This is especially important because students are often frustrated by others and issues in their life and if they do not have the language to express themselves positively, then this expression can possibly come out in negative ways. These could include self-harm or verbal or physical abuse towards others.

The environment where strategies were used became a subtheme of 'building school community' in this study and it was evident that students used these in many different areas. Henefer and Rodgers' (2013) study of Irish students showed the strategies were used when making new friends, relating to family at home and coping with issues at school. Davidson (2011) found in her study of English schools who used the programme as a whole class or in small groups that participants used strategies in various contexts such as at school, at home doing homework and other things and going places for outings outside of school. Sykes (2009) also found that students used the strategies after school with friends in her study. This is important because it shows that the strategies from the programme can be transferred to other areas outside the classroom environment, which can enhance an individuals' resilience. This was reinforced in the current study via student, teacher and parent interviews.

In this current study teachers specifically identified reductions in behavioural issues between students in the classroom as the programme progressed. Batra (2013) also noted that student reductions in socio-emotional and behavioural problems

occurred. This implies that classes with students who have challenging behaviours or are disruptive could benefit from participating in the programme, which could help in developing the overall positive class environment.

Creating the most effective environment for change to happen

In order for *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme to provide the best opportunities for students to develop their resilience, various aspects regarding the programme needed to be put in place at this school.

It is clear that a major part of the programme is around the research that has been done which has resulted in the fidelity of the programme. Therefore certain conditions regarding the implementation of the programme must be present. The Group Leaders' Manual states that the sessions should be taught sequentially for two main reasons. Each session builds on aspects taught in the previous lesson and extensive research has concluded that this is the most effective order in which to present the programme. The current school taught the sessions sequentially and also tried to ensure that students had grasped the concepts from one session before moving on to the next session, even if it meant taking longer on some sessions. Henefer and Rodgers (2013) also mentioned in their study of Irish children that teachers spent longer on some things and missed out others in their study, but also felt a bit rushed as they wished they started teaching the programme earlier as they ran out of time. Teachers in their study ran sessions once a week ranging from 40 to 80 minutes per lesson. A teacher in an American inner-city school taught the programme sequentially to 10 female African-American girls in five weeks, with two lessons per week, however this teacher also felt the time was too rushed (Cooley et al., 2004).

Furthermore, in order to teach the programme in schools, teachers need to attend a mandatory one-day training programme. In this case study the trainers were MoE trained facilitators. Therefore it is essential to have the right facilitator, as they are the ones that will inspire the teachers who will run the programme. In this school the teachers were trained and the Group Leaders' Manual devotes a page to guidelines that group leaders should abide by for successful implementation of the programme. These include positive reinforcement, specific feedback, self-disclosure, empathy, paraphrasing, summarising and reflecting. The teacher observed in this study clearly demonstrated these skills and as a result positive relationships were developed.

In addition is how the *FRIENDS* programme was mentioned in respect to being seen as successful in the style of presentation that it has. Neil and Christensen (2009) state that other programme developers should look to the *FRIENDS for Life* and *MY FRIENDS Youth* presentation style as this may help elicit the desired effects and engage participants effectively. They also found that larger effect sizes and more significant trials were seen in universal programmes (which *FRIENDS* is one of) compared to selective and indicated trials. This has important implications as students in the current study mentioned that the style made a difference as it was more exciting and the teacher seemed more at the students level compared to other subjects.

Moreover, relationships were a key part of the programme, which makes it effective. The *FRIENDS for Life* and *MY FRIENDS Youth* programmes are built on two teaching philosophies, which are the Experiential Learning and the Peer Learning Model as discussed earlier. The Peer Learning Model refers to students learning in naturalistic settings with peers (Barrett, 2012b). This has seen the development of relationships in this current study thrive. Other studies have shown improvements in relationships after participating in the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. Lowry-Webster and colleagues (2003) stated in their study that a strong partnership was established between the families and teachers as a result of the programme and community support had evolved also. Henefer and Rodgers (2013) found that many of the 27 teachers in their study felt they were able to develop relationships with students and that students saw them differently as they taught the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. Similarly, the programme allows teachers to get to know their students better and when this occurs the outcome is better student engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Furthermore, good relationships with the teacher are seen as extremely important to Māori students (Mckinley, 2000, cited in Williams, 2014). One Māori student in the current study commented that they had a great relationship with the teacher as they were helpful and believed they tried hard with the class. Overall, this shows that students felt valued when the teacher formed positive relationships with them and the programme does this in a natural, non-forceful way.

The Group Leaders' Manual states that there is an option to have two parent/caregiver seminars to enhance their children's involvement in developing resilience. One is recommended to be held before the programme commences and one half way through. However, these are flexible and can include more or less sessions if necessary. Parents are also recommended to discuss aspects students have learned

from the programme at home to help improve their child's skills and knowledge. Research suggests that when parents are involved in programmes that are childhood clinical interventions, then better outcomes occur (Barrett, Rapee, Dodds & Ryan, 1996). Parents from the school in this current study attended a caregiver session, but each year the attendance rate fluctuated. However, as they had information sent home, parents were informed they could contact the school regarding this if they were interested, as one teacher noted some did. Several studies found positive results when parents/caregivers attended the seminars. Essau and colleagues (2012) found that when parents attended more parent sessions, their children showed greater reductions in anxiety than those children whose parents had attended fewer sessions. Davidson (2009) found in her study of seven English schools, parental attendance to be low, but those who did attend had positive feedback for the programme. Similarly, parents in another study stated that they found all strategies taught at the seminars useful (Shortt et al., 2001). Lowry-Webster, and colleagues (2003) mention that parent information evenings generally have low up-take, and their study was no different as was Ahlen and colleagues (2012).

Following the programme's conclusion, the intention is that students later participate in two booster sessions to help them retain knowledge of the strategies learned (Barrett, 2012a). It is suggested these be taught roughly four weeks and eight weeks after programme completion. The aim is to review strategies in a fun way to help remind students to use them in their life now as well as in the future. This is important because young people need to be reminded of these strategies and to have an opportunity to reflect on how they could have used them since programme completion. Neil and Christensen (2009) mention that only the *FRIENDS* programmes and one other programme use booster sessions out of 20 individual school-based or early intervention programmes aimed to reduce anxiety. These two programmes had positive effects, however they stress that more should be done to evaluate the effectiveness of these booster sessions. As discussed earlier, this school used the booster sessions with Year 10 classes who had completed the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme the previous year, that were having issues in regards to lacking resiliency. This further shows the schools ability to be flexible and adapt these to suit the needs of their learners. Booster sessions were also used in an Irish study (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013) consistent with the manual recommendations and stated this added to the improvements seen in students in their study. Similar to the current study, an

American inner-city school, which facilitated the *FRIENDS* programme, was unable to implement the booster sessions due to time restraints (Cooley et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the teachers at this school were able to adapt the programme when necessary to meet the needs of their classes. They did this by getting to know their students and adapting various parts and including a mix of activities. Henefer and Rodgers (2013) stated that flexibility is necessary as some activities were unsuitable in an Irish context and therefore needed adjusting. Davidson (2011) also noted that the programme should be tailored for individual classes in order to be more effective. In another study of non-English-speaking background Australian migrant students (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001), it was noted that students would like to have more art, music and culturally appropriate activities, so it would therefore be advisable to know more about the cultures of the students in the class. Over 70% of teachers in the recent New Zealand national evaluation stated that the resources needed adapting and many did so by using Internet and you-tube clips (MacDonald et al., 2015). The Group Leaders' Manual also states that activities should suit the needs of the group and that teachers should be willing to change their programme depending on issues that arise in the class.

Discussions evolved as a major aspect of the programme at the school in this study and the teacher who was observed was able to implement more of these because the students seemed more engaged when they did so. This seemed a common theme in several other studies also. Cooley and colleagues (2004) found the teacher in an American inner-city school who facilitated the *FRIENDS* programme changed much of the written work for group discussion. Similarly, another study of 20 female, former Yugoslavian adolescent refugees living in Australia, found that the participants who participated in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme would have preferred more group discussion rather than just talking to the person next to them (Barrett et al., 2000). In another targeted study of students who participated in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme it was stated that they valued the small group discussions (Sykes, 2009).

Given New Zealand's bicultural society it is worth observing that Māori students enjoy learning from their peers when discussing their work, and feel more in control of their learning when working in groups. They also prefer to discuss and liaise with their teacher in smaller settings (Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007). Given the makeup of the school with several students identifying as being

Māori, it is relevant to note that Māori students prefer to learn via these group-based discussions. The teacher in this study roamed the class during her teaching sessions to help engage those students who seemed to struggle or who needed scaffolding with difficult concepts. This is an important implication for those teachers wanting to implement the programme in a school with a high Māori population. This is because if the programme is not adapted to include more discussions then problems in relation to buy in can occur as some students can ruin class dynamics which was seen in a New Zealand pilot (Sheerin, 2014).

A common theme that evolved was the belief from the teachers and students that there was too much reading and writing within the workbooks. Teachers at this school actively used discussions, read some parts of the book out or skipped some parts. As recently discussed in their study, (Cooley et al., 2004) a teacher at an inner-city American school changed much of the reading and writing from the *FRIENDS* programme to discussions, as students in their study struggled with the academic side of the programme. Similarly, Henefer and Rodgers (2013) also reported there was too much reading and writing and worksheet type activities in their Irish study. In another study, it was observed that there were issues between how much reading and writing there was and students struggled to keep up (Sykes, 2009). The New Zealand national evaluation (MacDonald et al., 2015) found that some teachers thought there was too much writing and reading involved and some students struggled with this.

Furthermore, one study of English students (aged 10–13) used the *FRIENDS for Life* manual for all students, even though the *MY FRIENDS Youth* manual was to be used for students aged twelve and over, due to it being too advanced for the students (Green, 2013). Students with dyslexia would have most likely had some trouble with aspects of the reading and writing involved and one parent in the current study did mention this as being a factor in relation to how it would have affected their son's self-esteem if there were too much writing as their child was dyslexic and struggled with lots of writing.

In relation to cultural aspects, the school made some adjustments that enabled students to identify with the programme better, such as changing phrases, words and scenarios to suit the New Zealand environment more, as did teachers in other studies as seen in Ireland (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013), New Zealand (MacDonald et al., 2015) and the United States (Cooley et al., 2004). For one New Zealand school, teachers

used the school marae to do the relaxation exercises, which the students enjoyed (MacDonald et al., 2015).

Supplementation of visual displays and other resources seemed to add to this programmes' effectiveness at this school such as laminated pictures, books and pictures drawn on whiteboards. Other studies have also noted this, such as Henefer and Rodgers (2013) in their Irish study. They mention that some teachers had to supplement the *FRIENDS for Life* resources with others recommended by their *FRIENDS* trainer, as some activities were unsuitable. The recent New Zealand evaluation noted that visual displays, within the classroom on the walls and ceilings, helped reinforce ideas from the programme and helped students think about programme aspects after sessions had finished (MacDonald et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the class sizes at this case study school were very manageable with an average of 22 students in classes that were observed. This seemed to enable the teachers to facilitate the programme effectively, as the students had sufficient teacher time and those that needed extra help were able to receive it. This was in contrast to another Mexican study that had a large class size. This programme was not as effective as researchers had hoped and this could have been due to the large class sizes, which had an average of over 32 students per class (Gallegos et al., 2013).

Sustainability of the Programme

In order for *MY FRIENDS Youth* Resilience programme to be sustainable in the future there are certain things that must occur.

The teacher of the programme should try and create an atmosphere where the students feel valued and also try and build a good rapport with the students as soon as possible as this creates an atmosphere of sharing. This was evident in the classes observed in this study as time went on, as the teacher worked hard to accomplish this by trying to accommodate the needs of the students. Students had said that there was an "*unwritten rule*" where things spoken in the class were not to be repeated elsewhere. This was mentioned in another study (Sykes, 2009) about how the strong rapport between the facilitator and the students contributed to whether students felt at ease in the programme and enabled them to share more easily. One future possibility could be a contract students sign to help enable them to share their thoughts more freely, as in another English study, about half of the students felt unsafe talking about themselves (Stallard et al., 2005).

It seems clear that more parental involvement in the programme will help the students gain the skills needed to build their resilience. Neil and Christensen (2009) suggest possible ways to increase parent attendance in the programme such as putting parent resources online, token reward systems and school fee credits. One parent in the current study commented on having information sent home so they could help their child learn the strategies better. Parents in another study reiterated this, as they would also have liked to have more information sent home (Rose et al., 2009).

Similar to having more information sent home is the Group Leaders' Manual recommendation that the students take home a journal to note strategies and skills they have learned to aid their resilience. This is because the Student Activity Book is recommended to stay at school, due to possible loss or students forgetting them if they are taken home. Students in another study (Williams, 2014) stated that they would like to have something to keep and look at when necessary. Students in England (Sykes, 2009) who got to take home their Student Activity Book mentioned how they were pleased and would refer to these at home.

Many studies, including the current one mention time as being a major factor in relation to the programme's effectiveness. It is vital that adequate time is allocated for the programme, not only to get through all sessions, but also to allow students to spend more time on aspects that teachers deem necessary. Teachers in Ireland noted that more time was needed for preparation and delivery (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013). Students in England also mentioned there needed to be more time to complete activities (Stallard et al., 2005; Sykes, 2009) and teachers in England commented that the programme should also not be interrupted (Davidson, 2011). In the current study various interruptions occurred such as the programme not being taught due to the absence of the teacher, or there being a Teacher Only Day or holiday on days when the programme was scheduled. Therefore, contingency plans should be made to allow for this. One option could be for a teacher trained in the *FRIENDS* programme to take the class if the facilitator is absent, rather than miss the class that week.

Furthermore, teachers in the current study only taught the programme once a week across two school terms, being either terms one and two, or terms three and four. One teacher has mentioned that teaching it once a week is an issue as students do forget stuff. The Group Leaders' Manual stresses that the programme should be taught twice a week, for 30 minutes to an hour, in terms two and three. This is to allow for students to settle into school in term one and for the programme not to be

interrupted in term four by school events that typically happen at the end of the year. Therefore, the time of year the programme is taught could be looked at. Henefer and Rodgers (2013) also noted that the time of year that it was taught made it problematic if it did not get started earlier on in the year. Other New Zealand schools had time issues as some classes ran out of time and did not complete the programme and others went on longer than expected which had repercussions for other topics (MacDonald et al., 2015).

In the future the programme could be facilitated with younger students. Several studies have shown that the *FRIENDS* programmes have been more effective in various areas with younger students, therefore indicating it should be taught earlier in life to students. A German study (Essau et al., 2012) found that younger children in a treatment group showed an immediate reduction in anxiety compared to older students who had delayed reductions in anxiety which occurred at 6-month and 12-month follow ups. Another study (Barrett et al., 2006) found that younger students showed greater reductions in anxiety than older students. This was also consistent for 12-month and 36-month follow-ups. They concluded that earlier intervention is better. Lowry-Webster and colleagues (2003) also suggested earlier intervention is better as students at age 10 were more at risk to anxiety and depression than those at age 12. Other New Zealand students stated that they would have liked to learn it earlier, possibly in Year 7 and 8 (Sheerin, 2015). This is an important implication because in New Zealand, students have often developed anxiety disorders or depressive symptoms by the time they reach college, and therefore it warrants consideration to teach the programme earlier if it will help prevent these issues.

Further to this, it is essential for teachers to network and connect with others running the programme, within the school and with other schools in the country. Sawyer (2011) stated that it was critical that networking occurred in order for the programme to be successful. New Zealand teachers believed that cluster meetings, visits to other schools and a national meeting enabled them to develop the programme more in line with the New Zealand curriculum. Networking with other teachers also gave them more motivation, made them more energised and positive (MacDonald et al., 2015). As a teacher in the current study believed in the value of networking, schools should make it a priority to enable them to do so in the future. Possibly, those who were unable to attend could have access to the outcomes or resources that

evolved from that meeting, or a blog or wiki could be created. This would be particularly helpful for those new to the programme as teachers in the current study, and others from a pilot in New Zealand (Lucas, 2014; Sheerin, 2014; Williams, 2014) have all expressed that their confidence evolves after implementing the programme for the first time. The guidance counsellor in the current study also noted the value of teachers getting together to discuss ways to improve the delivery.

A final aspect to consider for the programme's sustainability is that of teacher retention. If a teacher leaves a school, then that class needs a new teacher to attend the mandatory two-day training programme identified by Barrett (2012). Given the tight schedules of schools and teachers, and the funding required to train the teachers, this aspect could be problematic. In addition, New Zealand has very limited number of people in the country who can facilitate the training days so this may not be possible in the given timeframe (MacDonald et al., 2015).

Limitations

Given the promising results of the study, several limitations must be noted. There was a small sample size, but as this is a case study the results are not intended to be generalizable. This was also a single case study, of a high decile school, which will affect the transferability of it, however the school was in their third year and will therefore allow some learning from the case.

Parental input came from a small sample size, which included only those parents who were interviewed and given that the study was going to include only the parents of students who were to be interviewed, there were only a small group that could have been selected. Further studies are required in regards to the impact the programme might have on parent/caregivers and siblings in relation to their home life.

There was only partial member checking of educators done, with one teacher who was observed and interviewed. There was no member checking completed of the students, however their responses were checked if I was unclear of what they were saying, or meaning, in the interviews for clarification. The interviews were also audiotaped.

Although observations are by nature subjective to a degree, I intentionally used the lens of a researcher, rather than a teacher to make sure that what I observed was indeed what was occurring. This was aided at times by discussions after the class

with the teacher. Although this is not inter-observer agreement, it did contribute to enhancing the trustworthiness of the data.

A possible limitation could be in interviewing one group half way through the programme, and one group from the beginning given the second group of students in the class did not seem as confident as the previous class observed earlier in the year. This could be due to the strategies the first class had learned in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme. This resulted in taking longer to get student consent for participation. Only two teachers were willing to be interviewed and they were teaching the programme in their third year. It would have been of value to include a teacher who was teaching the programme for the first time, but this teacher was not comfortable to participate.

The timing of the interviews was a limitation because one group was interviewed at the end of term two, when they had finished the programme and completed all activities and learned all the strategies, whereas the second group interviewed were only half way through at the end of term three, and had learned only half the strategies. This affects the outcome of some results, for example, when the second group are expressing which strategies were most useful, they had only learned half of them.

Summary

Overall, this study has shown that *MY FRIENDS Youth* adds to the wellbeing of students and allows them to develop strategies and skills to enable them to become more resilient when facing various challenges in their lives. It has explored the experiences of Year 9 students and their teachers engaged in the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme that has seen positive results. In doing so, the aims of the study have been met in relation to the research questions such as the evaluation of how teachers adapt the programme which has shown successful results. Various strategies teachers observe students use most have also been discussed, as well as the contexts these have been used in. Finally, this study has established that students use a range of strategies in different ways in order to develop resilience in their lives.

This discussion showed that there were numerous benefits that contributed to the programme's effectiveness which were supported by international research. It also detailed how the current school created the most effective environment for change to happen and finally discussed the sustainability of the programme.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the agenda of examining a programme aimed at increasing students' wellbeing and results have shown the programme in a positive light as seen from parents, educators and students. Programmes such as this are going to be important in the future to support the youth of today in their quest to become confident, resilient adults.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research was undertaken to determine how one school implements a universal intervention aimed at increasing resilience and wellbeing in young people. School-based interventions to enhance wellbeing are seen as essential for school students as a high number of young people who have mental health issues do not access support. For some students, the situation is more dire, as students from low-socio economic schools are not seeking as much support due to significant barriers that limit their ability to receive help (Iizuka et al., 2015). Therefore, this shows the importance of the universal programmes such as *MY FRIENDS Youth* as it helps children and young people to access mental health support and remove obstacles. *MY FRIENDS Youth* was implemented at this school and facilitated by health and P.E teachers as part of the New Zealand curriculum.

The research explored questions that centred around how teachers adapted the programme to meet student needs as well as what strategies teachers observed students use most and in what situations and finally what skills and strategies students found most useful to meet their day-to-day challenges. The study established how the teachers adapted the programme in order for it to complement the curriculum as well as determine what skills and strategies teachers observed students use most such as relaxation and inner helpful thoughts. It was also important to establish where students used these strategies in order to cope with their day-to day challenges and to realise that they could transfer skills from one area of their life to another. Students found they could use the strategies with their friends and family, at school and in the community. As the students at this age face various challenges, it was important to see what strategies were most useful for them to help increase their resiliency as this will prove most valuable in their quest for success in the next few years.

This chapter explores the implications of the study and how teachers can facilitate the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme in more effective ways to meet student needs. These include the link between mental health and learning, the range of intervention approaches available for young people and why it is important to support

young people develop skills to help them become resilient. By focussing on why students found the programme useful and how this relates to classroom teachers, suggestions are offered as to how teachers can adapt their classroom in a way to utilise what has been found.

Supporting students through their teachers and parents

It is clear that teachers play a pivotal role in the students' acquisition of skills and strategies from the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme. Therefore, teachers need the support through professional learning and development to be as prepared as possible. If this does not occur then it is likely that their understanding of the programme, and their enthusiasm and commitment for teaching it, will be compromised (Iizuku et al., 2015).

Earlier studies suggest that targeting younger children through teaching the programme earlier in life may produce better results (Barrett et al., 2006; Essau et al., 2012; Lowry-Webster et al., 2003). As noted by students in this study, if possible the programme should be taught when the children are younger. If young people are already equipped with the skills and strategies to become resilient when they reach secondary school they may become more prepared to deal with daily challenges.

When parents/caregivers are involved in *FRIENDS for Life* or *MY FRIENDS Youth* they feel that they are able to help their children learn new strategies and can discuss situations where these can be implemented (Neil & Christensen, 2009). Parents and caregivers could be encouraged to attend evenings where the programme is introduced and discussed (Neil & Christensen, 2009). As noted by the participating parents in this study, they would have liked to access information on the programme so they could discuss issues or strategies that would be useful when their children have certain problems to deal with. This is consistent with the findings of Rose and colleagues (2009). For those that did attend school-based information sessions, parents from both the current study and another (Davidson, 2009) reported positive feedback regarding these sessions. This suggests the importance for parents to attend *FRIENDS* parental sessions as results show that greater reductions in anxiety were seen in children whose parents attended more parental sessions (Essau et al., 2012).

A critical component of success of the programme for students and teachers is ensuring the allocation of adequate time in order for the specific strategies and skills to be learned. The research points towards teaching the sessions twice a week over

two terms. Interruptions should be minimised because students forget things easily and it is important they have consistency as each session builds on the previous one. Having enough time is not only crucial to teach the strategies and sessions involved, but also to enable teachers to spend longer on sessions or aspects they believe necessary for students to develop or to learn specific skills (Barrett, 2012b). Teachers in the current study also reported this. However, in regards to the curriculum, this time component adds pressure as teachers must get through other aspects of the health and P.E curriculum and teachers have noted that it does affect their ability to do this.

Another critical component of success of the programme is in regards to cultural aspects that should be included in the future. As discussed earlier by one teacher, hauora could be included in the programme. Hauora is a specialised New Zealand Māori health philosophy which incorporates four dimensions of wellbeing. These are physical, mental and emotional, social and spiritual (Wikipedia). Other cultural aspects that come from different cultures that make up the ethnicity of a school would add to the programme's success. This school has already been involved in collaborating with schools that have already been involved in the programme and have discussed what works and ways they are implementing the programme, therefore it would be beneficial for these ideas to form a database of resources that new schools and teachers could use.

The link between an individual's mental health and their learning

The link between an individual's mental health and their learning is a pertinent one. In relation to anxiety and depression, it has been shown that many of those who are affected by either of these conditions have had their learning severely affected. Depression has been linked to poor memory and attention as students often lose hope and interest in things that were once important to them (Davison & Neale, 1994). Those young people who experience depression would often rather be on their own and do not like to communicate with others. This current school has realised this and has put in place avenues for students in need of more support. Pessimism is also a factor and can affect a student's learning as those affected by depression can think negatively towards achieving (Barrett, 2012b). It was shown that when students are involved in programmes that enhance a student's social-emotional ability, then this significantly improves a student's academic ability (Durlak et al., 2011). Finally, the effects of anxiety on learning have also been documented as children and youth at

various ages showed that those with anxiety have greater difficulty with their schoolwork than non-anxious students (Kashani & Orvaschel, 1990). With this knowledge in mind this current school has been able to ascertain which students need more help and have been able to provide the support or enable students to know where to access more support if in need.

The range of interventions available

This school is committed to the health and wellbeing of their students and has shown this in a number of ways. Finding ways of supporting children has been important for the teachers and as part of the programme they have ensured that students have access to other avenues of support. In conjunction with the programme, the school, through the teachers and guidance counsellor have enabled this access of support to be normalised and students have learned that everyone feels a bit anxious or down at times and that it is fine to talk about it. This normalisation of the strategies evolved as one of the subthemes of the study. Staff at this school realised that when some students need more help, then through their screening methods these students have been identified and given extra support, either at teacher-level or through the school guidance counsellor service.

Universal programmes, where all students access the programme, have been discussed in-depth as these had several advantages over other types of interventions. Research suggests using a universal approach more often due to the benefits such as low cost, lack of stigma associated and ability and success of these when used in schools (Iizuka et al., 2015; MacDonald et al., 2015; Neil & Christensen, 2009). Overall, universal programmes have shown they have the ability to normalise various feelings and issues young people face and allow them to deal with these in a positive, supportive way as students in this study and others have shown (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013; Iizuka et al., 2015). This has enabled others to give these types of programmes significant support and seems to be a way forward to meet the needs of young peoples mental health.

The importance of supporting young people develop skills

The pace of change in today's society highlights the importance to have students be adaptable to meet these changes and have the ability to confront them with a positive mindset. Young people also need to be able to cope with the various

challenges they face in their day-to day lives. This could be in relation to school, friends, extra-curricula activities or their relationships with others. If this does not occur, then students can leave school ill equipped and can struggle to find a way to fit into society productively.

In my role as a teacher at the regional health school, it is evident that some students withdraw from school, become isolated, often lose contact with friends and struggle to participate in society. One parent in this study referred to how it was important for students to learn these strategies so they don't "*go off the rails....some either go off the rails or become very sad youth who are not able to express themselves*". This parent as well as teachers and the guidance counsellor referred to how it was important that students realised that it was normal to have certain feelings and recognise that everyone is anxious at certain times. This is important because by normalising the strategies, it allowed students to realise they are not alone in feeling that way and then get help if it was needed, as mentioned by a teacher in this study. Other studies also showed this (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013; Sykes, 2009).

It was important for young people to develop these skills from the programme because this helped increase their self-esteem, a critical ingredient for resilience. Several studies showed this after participation in *FRIENDS for Life* or *MY FRIENDS Youth* (Barrett, Sonderegger et al., 2001; Gallegos et al., 2012; Liddle & Macmillan, 2010).

Sustainability of the MY FRIENDS Youth programme

Sharing talent

Students in this programme learned that when they help out others by giving their time or skills, it helps make them feel positive and adds to their positive self-image. Therefore, one possibility of *MY FRIENDS Youth* could be to have regular community days where students wanting to help in the community could share their talents or skills in a positive, productive way. Possibilities could include playing games or performing music, dance or drama at a retirement village or coaching or refereeing sports at primary schools or after school.

Peer to Peer

A main finding of this study and others was that students liked working collaboratively. It was important for students to work together and discussions were a

big aspect of what the students enjoyed. Therefore, in order to embed the programme into the school environment, more opportunities to include collaborative aspects need to occur. These could include current role models in the school sharing their *MY FRIENDS Youth* knowledge or anecdotes they have with younger students completing the programme or those about to participate in the programme. Discussions centred around how the strategies and skills from the programme have helped them achieve in sports, academic areas or relationships would be of use, as would discussing what they have learned, why it was useful and how they think it could be helpful in their future. Possible role models include sports captains or sport representatives, school prefects, academic achievers or various other students who engage positively in the school community.

Individualised Future Resource

Once students complete the programme, the intention is that students keep the Student Activity Book to help them refer back to when they need reminding how to use various strategies. However, students who have completed the programme may find it more useful to have a pamphlet, small booklet or individual page, which summarises the skills and strategies and is much easier to refer to when students want clarification of something. This may also be kept in a more obvious, noticeable place to help remind students regarding the strategies such as in a page in their diary or schoolbook, on their phone or a place in their room. Other possibilities could be that the *FRIENDS* acronym could be made into a fridge magnet for constant reminders and made noticeable to other family members to help them reinforce skills and strategies from the programme.

Links to other subjects and extra-curricula aspects

It is evident that students are using the skills and strategies in many different areas of their lives. However, over time they may forget these, therefore it would be helpful for other subjects to incorporate different aspects of the programme into their class to keep students in the mindset of using these. Examples could include students using inner helpful thoughts to overcome challenges they have and rewarding themselves afterwards. In many curriculum areas, students could use coping step plans or 5-step plans in order to break down assessments they have.

Why students found this useful

Young people in this study found the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme useful for numerous reasons. When students were faced with negative inner thoughts, they learned how to challenge these and ask themselves if they were true and find ways they could think positively. It was also useful to have these thoughts colour coded like traffic lights so red was negative, orange thoughts were challenged and green thoughts were positive. This led onto them being able to find solutions, similar to students in another study (Henefer & Rodgers, 2013), which was another significant aspect of the programme that the students found useful. Some students mentioned that they learned to list solutions and then choose the best one, whereas others said they found it useful by solving problems the '*right way*' rather than the '*wrong way*'.

Overall, the students found it useful to change their mindset. Students discussed that it was useful to step back and ascertain what situation they were in before deciding what strategy to use as some were able to help them relax or calm down, others helped with relationships and some were used in relation to school work such as coping step plans.

As the programme evolved, the strategies became a normalised part of the students' life and their mindset became used to thinking this way after a while. Students realised everyone was going through similar issues and hearing first hand from their peers what others were dealing with allowed them to individually open up and share as well as collectively find solutions.

The programme was also useful for the students at this school because they valued various parts of it. They valued having their own student workbook to reflect and refer back to as it helped remind them about strategies or scenarios they had discussed. These discussions were a significant part of what the students valued because as the programme evolved, their confidence in their ability to share and engage with others increased which seemed to help their self-esteem and confidence. According to the students, parents and teachers of this school this lead to students developing more resilience.

Enhancing the school community was another aspect students found useful, as they were able to realise that by doing things for others made themselves feel good so a win-win situation occurred. The bucket filling analogy enhanced this as students thought of themselves as bucket fillers, as reported by other New Zealand students (MacDonald et al., 2015). Moreover, as a result the students found it useful that the

programme helped develop their relationships in a more positive way, both at home, school and in the community. Finally, the way the strategies could be used in various other environments was viewed positively by the students especially in relation to the sports field, in the community and in their home life.

Implications for classroom teachers

Knowing what works for the students with regards to building up their resiliency and enhancing their wellbeing enabled classroom teachers to facilitate their class programme in a way in which benefited the students in several ways.

Supporting teachers in this school to learn aspects of CBT in their training seemed to help enhance the teaching of the *MY FRIENDS Youth* programme. By having the ability to understand more about CBT and young learners anxiety and the effects on their learning will hopefully allow teachers to adapt their classroom programme in the future. As shown by Iizuka and colleagues (2015) modelling and coaching specific ways of teaching the *FRIENDS for Life* programme has improved teachers' emotional resilience in Australia, therefore this would possibly help teachers in New Zealand also.

Classroom teachers of other subjects would benefit also if they adapted their classrooms. By having the *FRIENDS* strategies displayed in classes along with various quotes reminding students about positive ways to deal with things would be a powerful reminder, which was seen as successful in another New Zealand study (MacDonald et al., 2015). Having a certain strategy or skill being reinforced each week would help the students remember the strategies, as a teacher in the current study reiterated that students do forget things. Depending on the subject students are in would depend on the strategy a teacher helps remind students about. For example, in English, if they were about to study speeches and need to perform one, teachers may discuss the strategy of the coping step plans or the 5-step plan. Students in the current study said that when they had scaffolding sheets to help them write a speech they felt much more confident in doing them. Therefore, by teachers providing scaffolding sheets for students to help them break assignments into chunks would make it more achievable.

Research suggests that at times, more needs to be done for those students who have elevated levels of anxiety or depression (Barrett et al., 2006). Therefore, some students who receive the universal *MY FRIENDS Youth* intervention could possibly

need a targeted intervention if they still seem to have issues such as high anxiety or depressive symptoms. Therefore, if teachers were given training to help them ascertain the signs of students in this category, then this would be beneficial in enabling teachers to recognise these signs in order to refer the students on to specialised support. These students could also be given booster sessions around this, as Barrett and colleagues (2006) suggest, possibly in small groups, and some could also be referred to the school counsellor.

In conclusion, *MY FRIENDS Youth* has been implemented successfully as a universal programme at this New Zealand school. Furthermore, it has shown to be a successful programme that helps increase children and adolescent's resilience internationally and in New Zealand. If more programmes like *MY FRIENDS Youth* were accessible to young people, then New Zealand children and youth can develop strategies to meet the demands of their lives and increase their wellbeing, in order to become healthy resilient adults of tomorrow.

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Appendix A: Semi structured interview questions for student/ focus groups

1. Can you tell me about some of the activities you do in health and PE?

Explore the nature of the programmes discussed and if My FRIENDS Youth is not mentioned, show the student the booklet.

2. Is this a programme you have been involved in? What sorts of things do you do when learning with *My FRIENDS Youth*?

3. What do you think the aims of the *My FRIENDS Youth* programmes are? What is it about? Why is that?

Give details if not sure.

4. What did you learn through *My FRIENDS Youth*?

5. Have you learned any new ideas?

- Where do you use these skills ideas (strategies)?
- Do you use them at home, with friends, at school?

6. What do you find most useful when you need to cope with various challenges?

7. How do you bounce back after setbacks or obstacles that get in your way? What do you do, or what are your thoughts when you have bad news or bad luck? How did you know that? (probe: did you learn that from this programme?)

8. Have you talked about the *My Friends Youth* programme at home? What did you discuss? Did they see any changes in your behaviour as a result of the programme? Who with? Parents/caregivers, siblings, Aunts/Uncles?

9. Did you enjoy using the *My FRIENDS Youth* booklet? What parts were most useful?

10. How did your teacher help you? What strategies did they get across to you?

11. What were your favourite parts of the programme?

12. What were your least favourite parts of the programme?

Appendix B: Semi structured interview questions for teachers, principal, guidance counsellor

1. How did you (the school) get involved in *My FRIENDS Youth*? How was the decision made to try it out?
2. What do you think the aims of the *My FRIENDS Youth* programmes are? What is it about? Why is that? Give details if not sure.
3. How do you think the programme supports the students?
4. What were you hoping would help the students?
5. What skills/ strategies have the students acquired as a result of this programme? Where do you see them using those skills or strategies? Do you think they use them at home? How do you know? with friends? Any examples? at school? Any examples?
6. What skills or strategies do you think are most useful to help the students cope with various challenges they face? What strategies do you see them using most?
7. How do the students bounce back after setbacks or obstacles that get in their way? What are their thoughts when they have bad news or bad luck? Do you think they learned that from this programme?
8. Do you know if the students have discussed the *My Friends Youth* programme at home? What did they discuss? Did you know if Parents saw any changes in their behaviour as a result of the programme? How do you know this?
9. Did you enjoy using the *My FRIENDS Youth* teacher manual? What parts were most useful? What did the students enjoy most about the *My FRIENDS Youth* booklet?

10. Did you adapt any parts of the programme? Why was this? What parts did you adapt? Any cultural reasons?
11. How could you run this programme better next time? What could you include? Leave out? Do differently?
12. How did the training you received make a difference?
13. How important do you think resiliency is in teenagers at Tawa College? What other ways do students develop resilience at this school?
14. Do you think the students developed greater self-esteem as a result of the programme. If so How? Do you think this programme made a difference to their resilience? If so, How?
15. How do you know if *My FRIENDS Youth* makes a difference to these students?

Appendix C: Semi structured interview questions for parent/caregivers

1. What do you know about the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme? Explain a bit about it if needed.
2. What do you think the aims of the *My FRIENDS Youth* programmes are? Why is that? Give details if not sure.
3. How do you think the programme supports the students?
4. What were you hoping would help your child in regards to the programme?
5. What skills/ strategies has your child acquired as a result of this programme? Where do you see them using those skills or strategies? Do you think they use them at home? How do you know? with friends? Any examples? at school? Any examples?
6. What skills or strategies do you think are most useful to help the students cope with various challenges they face? Did they learn any of these from *My FRIENDS Youth*? If so, which ones?
7. How does your child bounce back after setbacks or obstacles that get in their way? What are their thoughts when they have bad news or bad luck? Do you think they learned any of that from this programme?
8. Has your child discussed the *My Friends Youth* programme at home? What did they discuss? Did you see any changes in their behaviour as a result of the programme? How do you know this?
9. Do you think your child has developed greater self-esteem as a result of the programme? If so, how?

10. How important do you think self-esteem is for building resiliency? Can you tell me why?

11. Did you have any information from the school regarding this programme? Or did you visit the school regarding this?

Appendix D: Staff Information Sheet

Dear _____ and other staff members involved with *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

Thank you for the initial discussion we have had in relation to my research and the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme in your school.

I am now formally inviting you to be involved in an evaluation of *My FRIENDS Youth* programme that you run at your school.

I am a Masters of Education student at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. This research project has received approval from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee.

The aim is to evaluate how teachers adapt and modify the programme. I would also like to evaluate what strategies and skills from the programme the teachers and staff see the students using most. I would like to interview the students to establish what skills and strategies they find most useful for helping increase their resiliency and help them cope with day-to-day challenges. I also aim to observe the classes running the *My Friends Youth* programme.

It is envisaged that the interviews will take about 30 minutes to an hour to complete. I will visit your school in term 2 and 3 to conduct some semi-structured interviews with students individually and in focus groups with those who have given consent to take part in the research. These students would have experienced the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme in term 1 or term 3. I would like to work with up to 12 Year 9 students who are a mixture of males and females and who are a mix of ethnicities representing the main cultural groups of the school. I would like to also conduct some semi-structured interviews with the Principal, teachers who facilitate the programme, the Guidance Counsellor and some parents. I will provide your school with information letters and consent forms for the students and parent/caregivers.

Should any participants feel the need to withdraw from the project, they may do so without question at any time. Just let me know at the time.

With permission, the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed and only seen by my supervisor and I. However at any time, it can be asked that the tape recorder be turned off. These transcripts will be able to be reviewed on request. Responses will form the basis of my research project and be put into a written report on an anonymous basis. It will not be possible for you to be identified personally. All material will be kept confidential and no other person besides my supervisor, Dr. Roseanna Bourke and I will see the interviews. No names will be used and the transcripts will be kept safe on a password-protected computer. The thesis will be submitted for marking to the School of Education and deposited in the University Library. It is intended that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals. Recorded interviews will be destroyed at the end of the project.

If you have any further questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me (, faylaur@myvuw.ac.nz) or my supervisor, Associate Professor Roseanna Bourke at the School of Education at Victoria University (Roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz).

I look forward to visiting your school and hearing about the experiences of the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

Laurence Fay

Appendix E: Student Information Sheet

My name is Laurence. I am doing a Masters of Education at Victoria University.

I am doing some research on a programme that is running in your school called *My FRIENDS Youth* programme. This programme helps you deal with any issues you may have and teaches you strategies and skills to cope better. Your views may help the programme improve so others may benefit in the future.

Who can take part?

You can take part if you are in Year 9, and you have or will be taking part in the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

What does it involve?

We will have a short talk with some other Year 9 students who are taking part in the programme and have some group discussions. It should only take about 30 minutes to an hour. I would like to find out about your experience of the programme. I would also like to tape record the group discussions. For some of you it may involve a semi-structured interview on your own. You can review the written transcripts if you want to at any time on request.

Your Rights

If you take part you can:

- ☐ Withdraw from the study at any time
- ☐ Refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time
- ☐ Know that your name will be kept confidential on any reports I write

What to do next

If you would like to take part I would appreciate it if you signed the consent form and returned it to your school. You can change your mind at a later date if you don't want to participate. I also need to get your parents' permission so I need them to sign a permission slip also and return it to school.

Want to know more

Ask your teacher or contact me and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Alternatively you can contact my supervisor Roseanna Bourke at the School of Education at Victoria University (Roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Laurence Fay

Faylaur@myvuw.ac.nz

This project has been approved by the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee.
If you are not happy with the project for any reason contact:

Human Ethics Committee
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington 6140

Appendix F Parent/ Caregiver Information Sheet

I am a Masters of Education student at Victoria University and as part of my degree I am doing a study on the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme

Your child has been invited to take part in a study of this programme.

The programme is being delivered by over 30 schools in New Zealand and Tawa College is one of these schools.

My FRIENDS Youth is a programme that aims to increase resiliency in students as well as help them develop coping strategies when faced with problems. It is a 10-session programme that is being facilitated by your child's Health and P.E teacher.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will be asked to take part in a group interview, along with other Year 9 students from their school. They will be asked their opinion of the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme as well as ways in which they have used aspects of the programme. This should take about 30 minutes to an hour of their school time. Some students may be asked to take part in an individual interview to discuss aspects of the programme also. If your child agrees to take part now, they can decide at a later date not to.

What will happen to the information my child gives?

If you give your permission for your child to take part in this study, only my supervisor, the other students in their interview group and I will know what they have said. I will use this information as part of my Masters thesis for University. The children's names, their teacher's names and the name of the school will not be mentioned in any reports I write.

What do I do next?

I would value your child's participation in this study. If you agree to your child taking part in this study then fill in the attached consent form and have your child return it to school. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me or my supervisor Dr. Roseanna Bourke at the School of Education at Victoria University (Roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz).

I am also interested in your views about the programme

While you may not have been directly involved in the programme, I would be interested in talking with you about your views on the types of support your child receives through their participation in *My FRIENDS Youth*. If you would be available

for an interview, taking 30 minutes to an hour, please indicate this on the form. If you or your child participate, then the recorded transcript can be reviewed upon request.

Regards

Laurence Fay

faylaur@myvuw.ac.nz

Appendix G. Student Consent form

I have been given enough information about the research.

I agree to talk to Laurence about the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand my real name will not be used in the research.

I am happy for our discussion to be tape-recorded.

Name.....

Date.....

Gender.....

Ethnicity.....

Thank you for your participation

Please give this form to the teacher in charge of *My FRIENDS Youth*.

Appendix H: Parent/Caregiver Consent form

- I have been given enough information about the research.
- I agree for my child to talk to Laurence about the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.
- I understand that my child can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study without having to give any reasons.
- I understand my child's real name will not be used in the research.
- I am happy for my child's discussion to be tape-recorded.
- I would be available for an interview with Laurence YES NO

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

Thank you for your participation

Please give this form to your child to return to the teacher in charge of *My FRIENDS Youth*.

Appendix I. Focus Group Student Consent form

I have been given enough information about the research.

I agree to talk to Laurence about the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand my real name will not be used in the research.

I am happy for our discussion to be tape-recorded.

I am willing to keep all focus group comments private and will not discuss comments made by others.

Name.....

Date.....

Gender.....

Ethnicity.....

Thank you for your participation

Please give this form to the teacher in charge of *My FRIENDS Youth*.

Appendix J. Consent form for teacher/principal/guidance counsellor

I have been given enough information about the research.

I agree to talk to Laurence about the *My FRIENDS Youth* programme.

I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand my real name will not be used in the research.

I am happy for our discussion to be tape-recorded.

I am happy to have information discussed put into a report.

Name.....

Date.....

Gender.....

Ethnicity.....

Thank you for your participation

Please give this form to the teacher in charge of *My FRIENDS Youth*.

Appendix K

Lesson Observation example- Session 10.

Teacher starts off lesson by reading out a quote from the Student Activity Book (P. 59) by Einstein “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity”.

Written on whiteboard is ‘Step 6- Do it every day

Teacher reads out p. 60 to students, which is about doing activities and strategies learned from the programme every day. Students listen attentively.

Teacher then asks students how they could get through a big essay coming up?

Students give answers such as ‘think of solutions, think positively and then a plan is discussed in class.

Students asked to turn to p. 62 of Student Activity Book and teacher says “there are lots of words in this book, so we need to skip some and make it a little bit less”.

This page is about the final letter in the FRIENDS acronym, S which represents ‘Stay strong inside and is about sharing the skills with family and the community. Teacher reads out this page and students complete activity 4 on p. 62. Teacher roams as students complete this and then the class discuss it.

Then onto p. 63 which is activity 5 and is about ‘feeling good through helping others and giving back to the community. Some examples are read out and then students asked to turn over the page and teacher gives example of helping out a lady at a taxi stand from her own life.

P. 64 students complete activity 6, which is about ‘helping someone out this week’

Teacher roves and discusses situations with the students and has a good rapport as students willingly share examples and get help with the writing of these.

Students then complete activity 7 on p. 65, which is about building school, family and community spirit, which is a contract of what they can do in their life to make things better.

As students are doing this they are respectful in class, have listened to instructions well, get on with their work and all seem to be writing examples when asked.

Students still writing examples as teacher roves and gives feedback on their work saying things like “Good, I like that one” and “well done”.

Overall, students seem happy to do work, there is no complaining about the programme and students seem polite to each other and the teacher in class.

Books collected up each time after class and once student s have showed their books they can go.