PROMOTING RESILIENCE TO REOFFENDING WITH YOUNG MEN EXPERIENCING ADVERSITY

STORIES INSPIRED BY

CHALKIE  HITS MAN  GRUMPY  GAZ  JOHN  MARCUS  MOUSE
Welcome to Changing Lanes… a toolkit based on a piece of research carried out locally, that helps us understand what can be done to support young men who have been involved in crime to find different paths. The toolkit shares the voices of eight young people who took part in the research. The aim of producing the booklet is to support your discussions and practice interventions with young people who have either been involved in criminal behaviour or who you feel may be at risk in the future.

We also wanted to raise your awareness of the things that are important to support young people’s resilience to reoffending. This knowledge has come from a local piece of research that interviewed eight young men to understand what can be done to support young people in turning their lives around after difficult experiences.

The purpose of the booklet is also to raise your awareness of the local services that were part of the research. These include Xtrax Young People’s Centre and Respond Academy who are both working to nurture young people’s resilience to reoffending. The young men spoke highly about the interventions they had received.

This booklet is a snapshot of the information that is out there and there are probably a number of services working to tackle this issue that are not included. If there is something you feel we have missed or got wrong then we really want to hear from you. We will update the booklet with the information you provide and mention you personally. Please contact us below:

info@boingboing.org.uk

The booklet can be downloaded at www.boingboing.org.uk
This is both a local and national issue. Nationally, around 88,000 juvenile offenders were cautioned, convicted or released from custody between April 2010 and March 2011. Around 32,000 of them committed a re-offence. This gives a proven re-offending rate of 35.8%. This represents an increase in the rate of 2.5% compared to the previous 12 months and a rise of 2.1% since 2000.

Hastings has the highest percentage of youth offending activity within the East Sussex area, comprising of 25% of the workload in the county. For young people aged 10–17 who are offending, of first-time entrants into the county’s criminal justice service, 28% were in Hastings, with 253 young people committing crimes (East Sussex County Council, 2010).

These figures emphasise the importance of understanding what is needed to support young people to bounce forward in difficult times, and how as professionals, parents, carers and community members we can all make a contribution to changing this pressing issue for society.

WHY DID WE FEEL IT WAS IMPORTANT TO PRODUCE THIS BOOKLET?
WHY IS FOCUSING ON RESILIENCE IMPORTANT?

Resilience has been defined as an individual’s capacity to bounce back following adversity. In addition, research has shown that resilience is a combination of individual and environmental processes working together to support the individual to thrive rather than just survive.

Here are some other definitions that may support you to get your head round it…

In 1999, Michael Rutter significantly developed the thinking on resilience by suggesting that “Resilience does not constitute an individual trait or characteristic...Resilience involves a range of processes that bring together quite diverse mechanisms...”

In 2000, Suniya Luthar and his colleagues stated that Resilience is “…a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity”.

Following this in 2001 Ann Masten suggested that “Resilience appears to be a common phenomenon arising from ordinary human adaptation processes”.

In 2007, Professor Angie Hart and colleagues provided a focus on people experiencing ongoing disadvantages and offered that “…resilience is evident where people with persistently few assets and resources, and major vulnerabilities...have better outcomes than we might expect given their circumstances, and in comparison to what we know happens with other children in their contexts”.

In 2010 Helen McGrath and Toni Noble advised that Resilience is “…the capacity of a person to address challenges and cope with times of adversity and hardship, and then return to a state of wellbeing…”.

A significant contribution was made by Michael Ungar in 2010 following from his work with disadvantaged young people and he suggested that “…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 wellbeing, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways”.

Finally, the most recent definition and one that strongly emphasises the ethos promoted within this toolkit was suggested in 2014 by Emily Gagnon and Professor Angie Hart, promoting resilience is “Beating the odds whilst also changing the odds”.

The definitions most useful for working with young people who have been involved in crime are those that recognise resilience as both an individual and environmental issue. Crime is influenced by both the environment and individual factors and therefore to tackle it we need to be working with both. Because resilience involves a combination of individual and environmental processes we have an opportunity as professionals and community members to increase the number of mechanisms in the young person’s environment, which will support them as individuals too.
The resilience framework designed by Angie Hart and Derek Blincow (2007) at the University of Brighton, has taken the research and transferred this into a practice framework that can be used with families and young people. The resilience framework proposes a range of interventions, known as “potions”, which are part of five separate but related areas, called “compartments”. The areas of focus are Basics, Belonging, Learning, Coping and Core Self. Together, under the umbrella of four Noble Truths, they form an approach designed to increase resilient responses to overwhelming adversity known as Resilient Therapy (RT).

The philosophy of RT is about joint responsibility between the practitioner, their organisation, the professional community and the young person, working together to beat the odds whilst changing them at the same time. In essence, the framework and resilience research recognises ten fundamentals to put in place, that work in support of promoting resilience with young people experiencing disadvantage:

**TEN THINGS RESILIENCE APPROACHES SHOULD TRY TO PUT IN PLACE:**

1. At least one trusted adult, with regular access over time, who lets the young person they ‘hold in mind’ know that they care
2. Preparedness and capacity to help with basics i.e. food, clothing, transport, and even housing
3. Making sure vulnerable young people actually access activities, hobbies and sports
4. Helping young people to be better at problem-solving at every opportunity
5. Creating safe spaces
6. Helping to map out a sense of future (hope and aspirations) and developing life skills
7. Helping young people to cope – teaching self-soothing or management of feelings
8. Support to help others e.g. volunteering, peer mentoring
9. High intensity interventions based on individuals needs and a joined up approach between home, school, college and other organisations for those that need it
10. Supporting children, young people, professionals, parents, carers to understand what resilience is and how they might achieve it for individual young people and the communities to which they belong

We will now outline the different aspects of the framework and give you some ideas for how you can think about them in your practice.

**RESILIENT THERAPY MAGIC BOX SUMMARY**

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<td>Predict a good experience of someone or something new</td>
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<td>Make friends and mix with other children</td>
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**NOBLE TRUTHS:**

- ACCEPTING
- CONSERVING
- COMMITMENT
- ENLISTING
What the framework focuses on is the importance of basic needs. Things like having a roof over your head, enough money within the house to provide good food, heat and water, these are central to the resilience approach that we are promoting. It is important to reduce these stressors to create a safe environment so that a young person is freed up to focus on other aspects of their lives.

- A report that was produced nationally showed that addressing such inequalities is actually what makes the biggest difference to happiness and good mental health. (Layard, 2005).
- The Transition to Adulthood Alliance (2011), found that stable accommodation, good health and sustained employment were the three main elements that made the biggest difference to reducing reoffending rates.
- The Ministry of Justice carried out a crime reduction prisoner survey in 2008. The results highlighted that two in five prisoners (40%) reported needing help finding a place to live when they were released, and of these, 84% reported needing a lot of help. Finally, three fifths of prisoners (60%) believed that having a place to live was important in stopping them reoffending in the future.

**THE RESEARCH…..**

John’s story emphasised the importance of having a place to live and its significance to his resilience to reoffending. The first time he came out of prison he had nowhere to live, and he shared the impact:

> Well, I thought anyway you go to prison, you might get a bit of help for when you come out, but you don’t. They just give you £64, and kick you on your arse. They don’t help you, you know they don’t help you get a flat or a room, you know a roof over your head. So I thought right, I need a roof over my head so I’ll get back in there. I booted the door over my ex’s, caused a bit of a scene. I got pulled away and put inside.

Angry John described how following release he was homeless and living underneath a bridge. The lack of basics such as a roof over his head became the motivation to re-offend.

Fortunately, the next time he re-offended a practitioner noticed what he needed and he was re-housed.

Grumpz echoed the importance of having somewhere to go after prison for his own reasons. He described the meaning for him of gaining alternative accommodation:

> You wouldn’t go back to the problem you know. You’d be out of that situation; you wouldn’t go back into a problem that could get you back into jail, you know, you don’t want that.

The young men highlighted the care they needed when leaving prison. They demonstrated how important it is that services understand the triggers to offending, at an individual and at a community level. Without these basics, prison becomes a protective mechanism, providing warmth, shelter and safety. Therefore, good enough housing is a key part of their resilience.

**XTRAX: PROVIDING THE BASICS**

Xtray Young Peoples Centre has been open for 19 years and offers young people somewhere to go when they don’t have any housing, support or need help. It was originally set up in response to the suicide of a local young man, who had tried to get help from local services all day but still felt helpless later when no services were open.

The drop-in centre provides an accessible and safe place for young people to get advice and support, enjoy a nutritious meal, take a shower, make use of the free laundry facilities, or just relax. The young people to get advice and support, enjoy a nutritious meal, take a shower, make use of the free laundry facilities, or just relax. Some of the main issues presented include: poverty, housing, employment & education, teenage pregnancy, mental health, self-harm, alcohol, substance misuse and relationship issues. Xtrax is open for 28 hours a week (3pm to 10pm, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday).

We use a consistent and non-judgemental approach. We make no promises but offer genuine support, compassion and the resources to find housing solutions.

We are also well placed as a team to help identify other personal issues which are often compounding the homelessness issue, in particular where repeat homelessness is a factor. The chaotic nature of the young people’s lives, demands a holistic approach looking at lifestyle, personal development, health and well-being, as well as identifying external barriers and addressing negative stigmas, which often perpetuates unhealthy cycles.

Young People that stay engaged with the service can feel a stake in our community, get involved in projects that ‘give back’, have the chance to help others, or engage with educational or healthy living projects. The projects we run are needs-led and we strive to stay on trend with the issues that each new generation bring.

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**IDEAS FOR HOW YOU CAN ENSURE THE YOUNG PEOPLE YOU ARE WORKING WITH HAVE ACCESS TO THE BASICS:**

1. Champion for better employment opportunities within your local community

2. Advocacy support in finding work

3. Developing volunteer and paid work opportunities within your organisation

4. Please have a think with the young person you are working with about what else you can come up with
Having somewhere where you feel you belong, where you feel you can be yourself is important for promoting resilience. Belonging is not just about people, it involves supporting young people to understand their story in the world, what has contributed to where they are now, including the tough stuff and helping them embrace this as part of their journey. It also involves supporting people to understand their responsibilities and how they can take ownership of their resilient pathways. Exposing them to new experiences and to people that will enhance their opportunities, is also key.

**The research.....**

A sense of belonging was achieved by accessing services; because of the type of approach on offer, the service becomes somewhere the young men can trust and feel safe enough to be themselves.

Accessing Xtrax Young People’s Centre saved Gaz’s life: I just, it’s quite weird yeah but I don’t know because I think like if Xtrax didn’t exist yeah, I don’t think I’d be here either. Truthfully, I just don’t because it’s happened a few times it’s been because of this place they’ve got me out of dark places innit.

Marcus described the impact of belonging to Respond Academy:

Well it’s like another home really, you know what I mean, and er... I just know I belong there because of the way I’m treated, you know what I mean. It’s like I’m treated with respect, so it makes me want to go there even more really and er, even safety comes back in. It’s just you know I know it’s a safe friendly environment and that’s what we need.

A sense of belonging was important. It contributed to the young men’s resilience to reoffending and psychological safety. Services provided somewhere where they could be themselves, meet others who they could relate to and gain the support, security and protection that had been missing.

The importance of belonging reinforced how resilience to reoffending is part of both individual and community exchanges. Belonging somewhere (through accessing a service, living in the town, becoming a father and creating a family) compensated for the young men’s loss experienced through the absence of family. Interactions within services, friendships, and intimate relationships were part of changing how they felt about themselves. Fundamentally, the stories demonstrated the importance of offering a consistent, reliable and persistent service working beyond limitations. The combination of these mechanisms can lead young men on a path towards opportunity and growth.

**Belonging**

**Ideas for how I can support the young person to experience a sense of belonging:**

1. Ensure they have access to a service or activity where they feel accepted and able to be themselves.
2. Maintain a sense of hope.
3. Support the young person to tell their story and to understand the impact on their lives and the learning they have taken from such experiences.
4. Exploring peer relationships, which relationships offer hope and opportunity and other professional services that may offer benefit.
5. Please have a think with the young person you are working with about what else you can come up with.
Learning takes place in different ways for different people and not just at school. This is not to dilute the importance of school and the intervention “Making school work as well as possible” recognises the contribution that school or other education providers can make. The framework recognises that opportunities to learn take place in a variety of contexts and relationships. It also recognises the importance of social and emotional learning. Approaching learning in this way provides a broader scope for intervening, focusing on the wide range of ways that exist to support learning.

**THE RESEARCH:**

The young men learnt through a variety of contexts and relationships. They were able to embrace both positive and negative experiences as opportunities to learn and grow. The following quote from Hits Man nicely illustrates his learning:

> That’s the one main thing, like that’s the main thing just learning. Learning is important – not in school, school’s crap. Not in, nothing else, life experience learning. Life experience

Learning, I just broke down and learned by my mistakes. And I just look back and I thought fucking ‘ell right, wow! – that’s a learning curve, that’s a learning curve. Cos everyone knows what learning is do you know what I mean, so I thought yeah that’s learning, that’s learning, that’s learning, what else can I learn, do you know what I mean. I got to the stage where I am at now and I know there’s more to learn.

**ENGAGE MENTORS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The services accessed both inside and after leaving prison exposed the young men to individuals who acted as mentors and supported their learning.

Marcus described how Respond encouraged the formalising of his talent into a qualification:

> I’d rather to go to Respond than college, you know what I mean, because like once again in college you have to do, you have to, it’s more like you have to, you know what I mean, where Respond is more of a kind of free environment.

Chalkie found a network of mentors in prison from the substance misuse team, counsellors, the prison guards and witnessing other prisoners’ acceptance of their position. He used this as a motivation.

> They’re always there for you, they’re always helping you and you can see them inside but you don’t on the outside. So I mean the counsellors were there. A lot of the guards you were able to talk to and they help because you know they said, you know we’ll get you through it and time will pass and you know every day is one day down and seeing other prisoners helped a lot, not for talking to them because the majority of them, it’s a huge shame, but the majority of them really are sort of accepting the way their lives are. But that’s why helping to see them made me think I don’t want to be accepting of the way my life. I don’t want my life to go this way. I was able to learn a lot of things that did help for when I got out.

Mentors acted as important change agents, helping young men to recognise their potential and equipping them with necessary learning, supporting their resilience to reoffending.

**LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND IDEAS TO SUPPORT LEARNING WITHIN YOUR WORK:**

1. Learning doesn’t always take place conventionally for young people: what accessible opportunities do they have access to that can support their learning?
2. What challenging experiences have provided opportunities for learning? How can the young person use these to their advantage?
3. How can you support the young person to map out a career/life plan?
4. How within your service do you highlight achievements?
5. Please have a think with the young person you are working with about what else you can come up with
Coping is really what it says on the tin and recognises the value of supporting young people to identify their emotional challenges and how they can manage them well. Part of this involves increasing the young person’s resilient toolbox so they have a range of choices and options available to them when life gets tough. This can involve a number of strategies from simply having a laugh, developing an interest, problem solving, to supporting young people to develop bravery skills and lean on others.

**THE RESEARCH**

**BE BRAVE**

Despite the adversity faced, the young men illustrated an innate drive, facing each of their challenges and continuing to move forward. Mouse felt his drive and determination was fundamental to nurturing his resilience.

I have been through alcohol, I’ve been through drug problems, I’ve been through the anger problems, and I have still walked out of everything on the other side, still happy, still smiling, still ready to take on every challenge … knowing that with a little bit of drive and a little bit of determination, I am still able to do it. Knowing I have just got to believe in myself first and foremost and I can do it, just need to believe in myself and that keeps me going.

Part of moving forward was recognising that he needed to be brave and do things differently. Chakke also describes this:

I knew I had to be different to how I was before and I knew I had to really think about my responses and that I had to take a bit of time out to, to think about myself, And that if I did feel overwhelmed that I should walk away, deal with it before I come back it. It’s not weak and it’s not, it’s not the wrong thing to do.

The young men demonstrated drawing upon different resources inside themselves and externally which supported them to Be Brave. Other things such as determination, risking doing things differently, and accessing services, make an important contribution to their bravery and help them on their resilient paths.

**IDEAS TO SUPPORT COPING WITHIN YOUR SERVICE:**

1. **What does the young person need to support them/her to Be Brave?**
2. **Ways of self soothing or looking after themselves?**
3. **Are there appropriate boundaries in place within your service to ensure young people learn, feel safe and valued?**
4. **What interests does the young person have? How can these be developed?**
5. **Please have a think with the young person you are working with about what else you can come up with**

**CARE SELF**

Core Self is in some ways the most tricky to grasp. The support within the core self compartment really focuses on what is happening inside the young person, supporting the young person to understand who they are whilst also recognising things that happen outside of them.

The focus here is instilling a sense of hope and supporting the young person to believe that things can be different in life, through the support that you are offering.

Empathy is an important part of core self-work, supporting young people to understand how others feel and helping them to take responsibility for their part in relationships and life in general.

When things feel particularly tricky, there are tried and tested treatments for specific problems. This intervention recognises that when working with a young person there may be challenges that they are facing in terms of their psychological health that require services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) or Adult Mental Health Services.

**THE RESEARCH.....**

The young men’s stories highlighted journeys involving setbacks. These came about as a result of social or developmental difficulties. They all used these opportunities to reflect and learn, including learning from negative things that had happened. If interest is the way their identities evolve through these experiences and the services they received.

In each of their stories (naturally varying depending on each young man) there is a search for acceptance, explaining their involvement in gangs and peer-led behaviours to gain approval. Self-acceptance is increased through engaging with services, alongside self-understanding, an increase in their internal locus of control, self-esteem and self-worth.

The core self mechanisms impacting on their resilience to reoffending included: help the young person know her/himself, help the young person take responsibility for her/himself, foster their talents and instil a sense of hope.

**HELPING THE YOUNG PERSON KNOW HER/HIMSELF**

Understanding what happened in their past, how that impacted on their present experience, their behaviour, and what they could do differently was paramount in supporting the young men’s resilience to reoffending.

Through accessing the YMHW, Mouse gained the following:

I realise the things I had done in my past wasn’t exactly the best way to go about it, and wasn’t the best thing to have ever done in my life and get involved with the police was probably my most fatal mistakes, but it happened and I can’t change it, and I wouldn’t change it as it has made me who I am. I am grateful for the things that have gone wrong and for the things that went right cause then that’s just made me a stronger and better person I believe in myself.

**FOSTER THEIR TALENTS**

All of the young men interviewed had a talent, from music to cooking, skateboarding and teaching. The talent exposed them to other mechanisms such as self-expression. Musically talented Hits Man and Marcus described it as a way of being heard, and for Marcus it supported him to manage his feelings.

**THE YOUNG PERSON AND THE WEEKENDS**

Understanding how the young person is coping with the support and what they need. The young person needs support on a weekly basis, for example, they may be coping with support when they are feeling more anxious or the young person needs support to be able to cope with the service.

**THE YOUNG PERSON AND THE WEEKENDS**

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CORE SELF

Hits Man discovered writing music at 15 and describes the impact on his life:

Yeah, it’s the music that’s saved me, man – music has saved me – I could be doing anything right now. You know what I mean? I could be fucking like half the dickheads out there shooting weed, beating people up and robbing them for their money.

Ideal for developing core self work within your organisation:

1. Are there opportunities within your organisation to develop the young person's talents or can you support the young person to access another activity or service?

2. Are you able to work with the young person to understand who they are, why they may engage in certain behaviours and how to support them to do things differently?

3. Where does the young person have responsibilities? How are they taking responsibility for their own life, are there opportunities to support this within your service? (this could be something small to start with)

4. What is the young person’s sense of hope for the future? How can you support this in the work?

5. Please have a think with the young person you are working with about what else you can come up with

Fostering talents amongst young people: A peer mentor’s experience:

Respond Academy is a Youth Led organization that we feel has made a huge impact on the lives of numerous young people in Hastings, St Leonards & Rother in East Sussex.

WHERE DID IT ALL START?

Respond, a young people's Showcase started up in 2003 from our house. We started doing a few Dj/Mc events for Greater Hollington and it spilled into the Community and then it just evolved by the sheer weight of excited talented young people.

By 2004, the creators, Pablo & JC were hiring St Peters Church on a weekly basis. The first sessions started with just 20 young people, but within a month it was over 80 young people and that’s where we started as peer trainers.

The Church was one large hall and the workshops just evolved in whatever section they were allocated on the night. Dance, DJ, Singing, Filming ART & lots of munchies in between! This became extremely successful as more and more people were joining in with the workshops.

The next minute Pablo & JC were being asked if they could organise performances in their local community.

Respond, a young people Showcase was too big and we had to find larger premises, an office and rehearsal space. We moved to Britannia Enterprise in 2005. In 2006 we were inundated with at least 30 to 50 young people on a daily basis. It was crazy!

We were approached by New Horizons EBD School to see if we would host a Pilot Education Programme with their most challenging students.

By 2007 we were even bigger and we moved to Silchester Mews, based in St Leonards-on-Sea, and RESPOND ACADEMY was born!!
The framework has key principles that support the promoting of resilience with young people, adults or for yourself.

Accepting, Commitment, Conserving and Enlisting form the bread and butter of the resilience framework approach.

ACCEPPING
This noble truth involves accepting where people are starting from, including understanding their history and appreciating why things are the way they are. This enables us to understand where to begin, acknowledge the challenges, to understand where to begin, appreciating why things are the way they are, understanding their history and accepting where people are.

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Chalkie described having a very positive experience from the services that he accessed in prison and this continued when he left prison too:

They’re very non-judgemental. They were, they were very calm. They spoke to you like a person rather than like a prisoner.

The way Gaz described the acceptance from Xtrax was similar to an unconditional parent. He described how he felt able to go and do what he wanted, mess up at times and still felt accepted.

He described this:

Just like everyone used to help me out and that and I used to be like a dick. I was kicking off and stuff still and like, obviously I’ve kicked off before and that and where other people have got barred for it for like a month and that, I’d like leave and come back tomorrow and I’d still be allowed in and that.

Mouse described the effect being accepted by a service had on him:

Yea, it made me feel like I wasn’t a child anymore, I was being respected, I was being treated fairly, treated like I was a grown up, and for me that was all I really wanted was to be treated fairly and like a grown up, and I just wanted to be acknowledged as an adult really, and it was nice knowing that I had someone there going yea! if you wanna do it go for it, and nice knowing that I had the support there.

Hits Man describes the importance of being treated like an equal and being accepted within Respond:

You’re not some next fucking piece of shit, do you know what I mean, you’re you, if people accept you, you feel better because you know that you’re an acceptable person. So that makes you feel better because you know that people can accept you.

The young men describe how receiving acceptance from others begins to change something inside. They feel ‘better’, ‘happier’, they begin to believe that they have potential that they are an acceptable person and they receive an important mechanism that has been missing and they don’t need to access it through illegitimate ways.

COMMITMENT
The young men described experiences of relationships with parents, other services where they had felt let down or for some, left. Within their stories, terms such as ‘loyalty’, ‘consistency’, ‘being stayed with’ and ‘security’ were mentioned a lot.

John disengaged from the service that he was accessing for fear of receiving a similar experience to those in the past. It was the tenacity and commitment of his key worker that had an impact on his own motivation:

It makes you want to do, it makes you want to sort of achieve for yourself. You give me a bit of sort of self-belief that I can do things for myself, that things are going to get better. It’s not going to happen overnight but it will get better eventually.

He was able to internalise the value that he received from the service through the consistency that was offered, resulting in him developing a commitment and self-belief that there was hope for things to improve.

Gaz echoed this sentiment when he described his experience of commitment from Xtrax:

Er, it pushes me to like do it, not to fucking go back to being a dickhead and doing what I was doing because before I, I was a thieving little shit. Yeah, it just feels like it’s worth like trying to be, trying to keep on doing better and to not give up again and go back down the same road again.

Commitment is clearly important for these young men in nurturing their resilience through taking the pressure off, enabling them to feel safe and held onto. It provides them with the care and nurturing that they didn’t receive and it provides them with the care and nurturing that they didn’t receive and ultimately contributes to their happiness. Furthermore, they adopt this commitment and it impacts on the loyalty and stability that they offer themselves. As a result of people staying with them, they become more committed to themselves and their self-worth.

TRUST
The positive consequence of services committing to them meant they were able to trust. Having such trust was unique and a different experience, which supported them to thrive.

John described what he felt were the key ingredients a service needed to be offering:

Well a lot of it… trust. You need to have trust in the service, and consistency. Yeah. If service says they’re going to do something, the need to sort of crack on and not let you down. So I think if you let someone down once they’re just not going to trust your service at all afterwards are they. They’re not going to sort of tell you what they want, what they need. They’re just going to go back to what they were doing.

Accessing and trusting in the service was a key turning point for John:

Well, it’s a mix really. There’s T, finally being able to trust in a service. Things actually started to happen. I didn’t believe that things could happen. It means you continue it don’t it? It makes you sort of, a bit of motivation. Well yeah, it makes you more motivated to do things yourself as well because at that time you know I tried all
THE RESEARCH....

The way the service engaged with the young men impacted on the level of investment the young men would place in the service. The young men’s narratives highlighted how much they valued the offering of an informal approach.

Marcus felt that the way informal way in which Respond approached his learning was more suited to his needs:

I’d rather to go to Respond than college, you know what I mean, because like once again in college you have to do, you have to, it’s more like you have to, you know what I mean, where at home and at Respond it’s literally I could do what I wanted at the time, which was gonna help me at the time.

He described the impact that this environment had on him:

It’s like I’m treated with respect, I’m treated as a self-individual, and um people, like you know I’m being helped. So it makes me want to go there even more really and er, even safety comes back in. It’s just you know I know it’s a safe friendly environment and that’s what we need.

The young men illustrated how an informal approach gives them the freedom to step into it and receive what is on offer. The services appear real. They felt treated with respect and safe to open up. There is no pressure coming from the service and they can be how they want to be and reveal what they want to.

CONSERVING

Conserving supports the taking of positive and negative experiences that the young person has experienced and using them to the best effect. An example of this may be supporting a young person to volunteer within a project to build on their skills and conserve them.

When he was struggling at school, Marcus was referred to Respond by the Connexions service. Respond encouraged him to conserve and build on what he was good at, his music. This gave him something to be proud of:

Well um, it was something to be really proud of really because um you know where we was all young, um it was like we done something quite amazing really you know.

The young men illustrate the importance of building on their potential, acknowledging who they are and recognising the skills and characteristics they have developed, despite their adverse experiences. This is further encouraged through services in creative ways.

Through their response to adversity, the young men also “conserved” such encounters, transforming them into resilient moves.

Finally, we mustn’t forget Hope. Whether it is in Basics, Belonging, Learning or Core self we believe that there is always something that can be done. If things within each of those areas are not there at the moment then there is a way to create them, make them happen. If the past has been difficult then the future offers a possibility to experience something different.

Resilience is not magic… it’s persistence, determination and a creative imagination!

TO SUM UP

What we have tried to demonstrate here is the importance of working with young people at risk, in a way that not only recognises the ecological contributions yet also works to challenge those systems, recognising the impact they have on the young person’s resilience. By using principles within this approach, you should manage to sustain the impact and stand an even better chance of improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged young people.

A partnership project between the Young Men, Gaz, Grumpz, Hix Man, Marcus, Mouse, John and Chalkie. Xtrax Young People’s Centre, Respond Academy, Boing Boing, University of Brighton and Hastings Voluntary Action. Dr Claire Stubbs carried out the research in partnership with the young men. The young men chose alternative names that they would like to use for the booklet as they wanted to remain anonymous. Due to the tight knit community they live in, a pseudonym was a resilient move in support of their confidentiality.
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