

Shining a light: Support for the silently disengaged

Graeme Dingle Foundation Research and Evaluation

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Pathways to re-engagement

Graeme Dingle Foundation's social research unit has turned the spotlight on the issue of youth disengagement from school and society, uncovering pathways to re-engagement.

During 2020 the Graeme Dingle Foundation saw an emerging and critical need for ways to address the negative events and distress faced by young New Zealanders, due to the impact of Covid-19. The Foundation moved fast to extend the reach of two flagship programmes, *Project K* and *Career Navigator*, more widely into the community, providing a broader base of support for rangatahi who were struggling - or identified as heading toward disengagement from school.

The Foundation currently delivers programmes to 28,000 tamariki and rangatahi across Aotearoa each year and has a 25-year record in researching and evaluating the effectiveness of programmes for youth. In 2021, given the existing robust research and evaluation practices around the effectiveness of the Foundation's programmes, the research team were able to design an evaluation framework for both pilot programmes **Career Navigator Community** and **Project K Community**.

We embarked on this crucial piece of evaluation to investigate the effectiveness of our two pilot programmes.

The findings revealed a group of young people disengaging from their peers, education, and society with little recognition. Many in Project K were still in school but taking to their rooms and socialising online - leaving their parents and caregivers feeling isolated, struggling to reengage them. However, as participants engaged with our Career Navigator and Project K Community programmes, their outcomes started to change.

Through further investigation, Graeme Dingle Foundation's research team found that social withdrawal behaviour has become a consistent theme for youth worldwide, with many young people flying under-the-radar. Known as 'silent' disengagement this has become a pressing issue. When young people experience significant adverse events - such as the Covid-19 pandemic - their motivation and confidence can decrease while their social anxiety increases, resulting in spending more time isolated in the home and being less connected with their friends, learning, and community. This can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and future outcomes.

However, the findings of Graeme Dingle Foundation's research show that through the inclusive environments created by these community-based pilot programmes, young people had a chance to test their ability, explore identity, and practice skills which they can apply to future challenging situations. Additionally, these programmes provided a safe place for rangatahi to gain confidence in their interactions with a diverse group which fostered connection and a sense of belonging - being 'seen.' Some uplifting and strong results have been seen with both programmes.

These findings show youth development programmes such as *Project K Community* and *Career Navigator Community* can make a material difference to the outcomes of young people.

The Foundation's strategy is to broaden its reach to meet the needs of young people as the country comes out of the Covid-19 lockdown scenario. With investment now, this research shows it is possible to turn young lives around, building productivity, social and economic prosperity in Aotearoa, New Zealand for future generation

Who are the silently disengaged?

Intense emotions and the growing importance of peer interactions make adolescence a vulnerable time for healthy social and emotional development. The phenomenon of 'hikikomori' – that is, youth who are disengaged from interactions with their peers, school, and community – was first raised as a concern in Japan and is now recognised worldwide.¹ In Aotearoa New Zealand, an Education Review Office (ERO) survey of secondary school students, principals and teachers found that Covid-19 has further decreased student attendance and enjoyment of learning, increasing the risk of adding to the growing number of disengaged youth.² Disengaged students making the transition from school to work are more likely to feel socially anxious and less likely to function, thrive and connect with others, reducing their motivation to seek employment.³ Young people who are disengaged from learning are more likely to leave school early, unlikely to study later in life and less likely to be fully engaged in employment, education or training. "About 18% of early leavers remain disengaged from education, training and work their entire adult lives."⁴

The problem of youth withdrawing can easily be overlooked due to traditional ideas of 'at risk' groups who are often assisted with a large amount of support, e.g., by Oranga Tamariki, MoE and various NGOs, whereas socially anxious and disengaged youth are more likely to socially withdraw, becoming "silently disengaged and hidden away from public scrutiny."⁵ Furthermore, schools may not recognise these young people as having any issues or needing help. Consequently, there is a gap in services for the growing number of silently disengaged youth who without support and intervention may remain socially isolated for long periods of time. Youth who increasingly reduce social interactions may seclude themselves more and more in the home and substitute online interactions for in-person relationships. A 2018 study of 1917 Dutch adolescents aged 16-25 years found that 12% of participants formed a high withdrawal group. These

¹ Wong, V. (2012) Social withdrawal as invisible youth engagement: Government inaction and NGO responses in Hong Kong

² ERO Govt NZ, learning in a Covid-19 world: The impact of Covid-19 on schools ISBN 978-1-99-000235-9 <https://ero.govt.nz/search?keywords=Disengaged+and+Covid-19> Accessed 16/02/2022

³ Workplace Identity and relationships, Retrieved [September 2021], from https://ntgc.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Psychology_RS_work-place-identity-and-relationship.pdf.

⁴ Lamb, S. & Huo, S. (2017) Leaving school early means you're likely never return to study and training in adult life. Victoria University, originally published in The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/leaving-school-early-means-youre-likely-never-to-return-to-study-and-training-in-adult-life-79346>

⁵ Wong, V. (2012) Social withdrawal as invisible youth engagement: Government inaction and NGO responses in Hong Kong

individuals reported the highest levels of shyness and anxiety, reduced social contact and were persistently withdrawn throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.⁶

Research background

In 2021, the Graeme Dingle Foundation introduced two community-based programmes. These were developed in response to requests from providers of youth services and parents/caregivers to extend the reach of our programmes beyond school and into the wider community. Furthermore, the programmes took into consideration the negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic and the extended periods of school closures were having on the mental health and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand youth. In particular, the disruptions and changes to the labour market that meant for young people making the transition from school into further education and employment, there were fewer opportunities in sectors where young jobseekers may have expected to find employment.

The Graeme Dingle Foundation's two community programmes are:

1. Career Navigator Community – An adaptation of the Foundation's Career Navigator school-based programme. The aim of the programme is to support young people within a community to seek meaningful employment and build work-ready skills. Industry mentors, worksite visits and experiential workshops address some of the major barriers for young people seeking employment.
2. Project K Community – An adaptation of the Project K school-based programme, a Graeme Dingle Foundation's flagship programme for young people aged 14–15 years that has been operating for over 25 years to improve the wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand youth. During the programme, participants complete three components that aim to provide them with opportunities for growth: a wilderness adventure, a community challenge, and six months of weekly mentoring with a trained adult mentor.

Selection guides were designed following Theory of Change community stakeholder workshops that were conducted to identify young people within a community who would benefit most from the programmes. Careful consideration of whether an individual is a suitable potential participant helped us to:

- protect vulnerable young people who had needs that may have exceeded the skill set of the staff running the programme
- ensure participants did not pose a risk to the safety of themselves or others

⁶ Barzeva, S.A., Meeus, W.H.J. & Oldehinkel, A.J. *Social Withdrawal in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Measurement Issues, Normative Development, and Distinct Trajectories.* *J Abnorm Child Psychol*, 47, 865–879 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-018-0497-4>

- ensure participants were able to take part in challenging experiences while maintaining their physical, psychological, and emotional safety
- ensure that all participants had the potential to work together as a cohesive team and therefore to fully benefit from the experience.

Theory of Change evaluation

This report combines findings from the Theory of Change evaluation process for the two community programmes. Together the evaluations revealed key features of the process of youth disengagement and essential strategies of youth development programmes that bring about positive change and personal growth, and effectively facilitate reengagement.

Theory of Change stakeholder workshops and mixed-method (both quantitative and qualitative) triangulation evaluations were used to provide a more in-depth exploration of programme processes and outcomes. The approach also aimed to clarify the theory behind the community programmes, examining how the programmes result in their intended outcomes and provide us with a visual depiction of how the programmes are proposed to create positive change.

This report considers outcomes from qualitative data collected through stakeholder workshops and interviews.

Stakeholder workshops

As part of the Theory of Change evaluation approach, pre-programme stakeholder-driven workshops attended by community representatives were used to explore the antecedent conditions or initial situation that prompted the decision that the community programmes were needed and to identify the young people who would benefit most from the proposed community programmes. Feedback from the pre-programme workshops was used to support the participant selection process, the construction of a proposed programme model and a participant selection guide designed to be used by referral agencies to support the selection process.

At the end of the Career Navigator Community eight-week intensive course and the Project K Community Wilderness Adventure, stakeholder workshops were again held to examine the profile of the selected participants, the essential programme strategies that were thought to drive positive change, programme outcomes and the factors that facilitated or impeded programme success.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore processes and short-term outcomes from the Project K Community Wilderness Adventure and the Career Navigator Community eight-week intensive course.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format using a list of questions and topics to guide conversation. Where appropriate, the conversation was allowed to stray from the guide to capture any other relevant information.

Project K community interviews

At time point one, interviews were conducted to elicit information on participant profiles, e.g., why did the parents/caregivers want their child to participate in the programme and what did they hope their child would gain? At time point two, interviews were conducted to elicit information on the young person's experience of the programme and any subsequent changes in behaviours and attitudes.

Parents/caregivers' interviews were conducted at two time points. Time point one was at the start of the Wilderness Adventure, and time point two was 8–12 weeks after completion of the Wilderness Adventure.

The Wilderness Adventure facilitators' interviews were conducted on-site at Great Barrier Island within two weeks of the young people completing the Wilderness Adventure.

The participants' interviews were conducted in groups of two or four after their return from the Wilderness Adventure and during the Community Challenge component.

Also included in this report are quotes from end of programme interviews conducted with a participant, parent/caregivers, and a whanau teacher.

Career Navigator community interviews

Interviews were with four participant cohorts, a total of 28 participants, age range 16 to 25 years: 19 female, 9 male. The interview questions examined the participants' perspective of their experiences during the transition from school to employment: what they had hoped to gain from the programme, how the eight-week intensive course had helped them and how they feel about the future now.

Quantitative data

Early analysis of the Career Navigator Community quantitative data is available and has been included as an appendix in this report. Two cohorts of Career Navigator Community participants completed quantitative measures examining career self-

efficacy, social self-efficacy, social interaction anxiety and employment hope. Participants completed the surveys pre-programme and at eight weeks post-intensive stage (see Appendix A).

Project K Community participants completed quantitative measures examining self-efficacy, resilience, life satisfaction and social anxiety. Participants completed the surveys pre-programme, mid-programme, and end-of-programme. *

** The Project K Community findings are not available at the time of this report and will be presented later.*

Why do youth silently disengage?

Factors leading to disengagement and social withdrawal

Parents and caregivers of Project K participants and Career Navigator participants were asked to describe life for the participants before the programme. Thematic content analysis of the qualitative interviews revealed that over time the young people responded to stressful events and negative peer appraisal with decreased confidence and motivation and increased anxiety and disengagement.

There were four major themes common to the experiences of the young people before taking part in the youth development community programmes: adverse stressful events, negative peer judgement and social comparison, anxiety and social withdrawal, and fear of failure and shame.

Adverse stressful events

Studies have shown that developing social competence is associated with better school performance and is significant for mental health in young adults, while loneliness can undermine a young person's judgement of their social skills and adaptive functioning. Consequently, there is evidence of a longitudinal association between adolescent social competence and healthy adult functioning.⁷

Common across the interviews were descriptions of the young people having experienced a stressful event in early to mid-adolescence, such as peer rejection, bullying, learning difficulties, a change in family relationships due to death or divorce, or moving to a new city. Interviewees also describe social withdrawal behaviours that began in response to this stressful experience. It appears that the negative experience led to a negative appraisal of their self and their abilities relative to their peers, including their perception of their social competence. As a consequence, the young person started to reduce social interactions, spend less and less time with their peers and in activities they had once enjoyed and more time socially isolating within the home, thereby removing themselves from further stress and anxiety.

Experiences with peers and building friendships are important for developing social and cognitive skills; therefore, reducing social interactions limits the opportunities that are available to the young person to experience successful interactions and to challenge negative cognitions around their abilities and social competence. Given the importance of peers in adolescence, when young people experience peer rejection, bullying and

⁷ Romppanen, E., Korhonen, M., Salmelin, R.K., Puura, K., & Luoma, I. (2021) The significance of adolescent social competence for mental health in young adulthood. *Mental Health & Prevention*, Vol. 21, 200198, accessed 28th March 2022. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212657021000027>.

loneliness, they are at more risk of developing affective conditions such as depression and anxiety and this in turn further increases the tendency to socially withdraw and disengage.

Social comparisons and negative self-appraisal

Young people spend somewhere between one-third and one-half of their waking time at school and many of their social interactions are with their peers.⁸ Therefore, in adolescence, peer influence and the importance of obtaining peer approval are heightened. In school settings, social interactions can promote successful social adaptation, but there is also the possibility that the young person will be negatively judged and evaluated.⁹ Furthermore, Festinger's social comparison theory posits that individuals when they are uncertain about their abilities tend to compare themselves to others. Adolescents who are uncertain about various aspects of themselves are therefore more vulnerable to negative comparison information and self-evaluations. These negative comparisons can lead to poorer outcomes for the adolescent such as feelings of academic inferiority, lower levels of self-esteem and happiness, and higher social anxiety.¹⁰ Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the increase in the use of social network sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, are likely to have increased social comparisons online (SCO). While research has found some positive effects of SCO, it has also found a negative relationship between SCO and psychological wellbeing.¹¹

Fear of failure and shame

Facilitators reported that participants demonstrated self-sabotaging behaviours that they perceived was due to a fear of failure and that these factors initially contributed to a reluctance to try new things. Young people who are anxious, high in self-doubt and uncertain about their ability to avoid failure or achieve success also tend to have a fear of failure, defined as a "persistent and irrational anxiety about failing to measure up to the standards and goals set by oneself or others."¹² When faced with novel challenging

⁸ Blöte, A.W, Miers, A. C., Heyne, D. A. & Westenberg, P.M. (2015). Social Anxiety and the School Environment of Adolescents. In K. Ranta, A M La Greca, L-J Garcia-Lopez, M. Marttunen (Eds) *Social Anxiety and Phobia in Adolescents* (pp. 151-181). Springer. doi 10.1007/978-3-319-16703-9

⁹ Orben, A., Tomova, L., & Blakemore, S. J. (2020). The effects of social deprivation on adolescent development and mental health. *Lancet Child Adolescent Health*, 4(8): 634–640. Published online 2020 Jun 12. doi: 10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30186-3

¹⁰ Miao, H., Li, Z., Yang, Y., & Guo, C. (2018). Social Comparison Orientation and Social Adaptation Among Young Chinese Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Academic Self-Concept. *Frontiers in Psychology*, volume 9, Retrieved February 2022 from <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01067>

¹¹ Ruggieri, S., Ingoglia, S., Bonfanti, R. C., & Lo Coco, G. (2021). The role of online social comparison as a protective factor for psychological wellbeing: A longitudinal study during the COVID-19 quarantine. *Personality and individual differences*, 171, 110486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110486>

¹² Martin A.J. (2012) Fear of Failure in Learning. In Seel N.M. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_266

experiences, young people may initially appear not to be bothered, go silent or into a deliberate tangent, as actively sabotaging their chances of success provides them with an excuse, other than a possible lack of ability, if they do not do so well. Research examining the link between fear of failure and shame found that individuals high in fear of failure are more prone to shame and more concerned about telling their mothers and fathers about experiences of failure.¹³

Anxiety and social withdrawal

Studies show that social anxiety often begins in adolescence and is a primary reason that many young people stop socialising, stop attending classes and leave school prematurely.¹⁴ Symptoms of social anxiety disorder include a lack of desire to socialise, being withdrawn, avoiding eye contact, and having a deep fear of social scrutiny. Most individuals with social anxiety disorder reveal very little about themselves to their peers and are often afraid to engage and initiate conversations, adversely affecting their ability to function, thrive and connect with others.¹⁵ In adolescence, a growing self-consciousness, sensitivity to peer evaluations and fear of social humiliation and embarrassment increase a young person's vulnerability to social anxiety.¹⁶ Older adolescents with social anxiety are more likely to struggle to participate in life after school, and any negative experiences during the transition to work or further education can reinforce their negative self-appraisals and anxiety. Many of the Career Navigator Community participants described choosing to spend more time alone following early negative experiences in work or further education courses. Furthermore, the decreases in parental supervision and increases in autonomy that come with increasing age made it easier for the young people to avoid social interaction and increasingly seclude themselves in the home.

Moderating factors

Caring, character and family connections

Lerner's five Cs (i.e., competence, confidence, connection, character and caring) are five ideal outcomes that youth need to thrive and, therefore, that youth development programmes want to achieve when working with young people. In this project, interview

¹³ McGregor, H. A., & Elliot, A. J. (2005). The Shame of Failure: Examining the Link Between Fear of Failure and Shame. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(2), 218–231.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271420>

¹⁴ Ameringen, M. V., Mancini, C., & Farvolden, P. (2003). The impact of anxiety disorders on educational achievement. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 17(5), 561–571. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185\(02\)00228-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185(02)00228-1).

¹⁵ Ignite treatment Centers. (n.d.). *Social media and social anxiety in Teenagers*.
<https://igniteteentreatment.com/social-media-social-anxiety-teenagers/>

¹⁶ Yli-Länttä, H. (2020). Young people's experiences of social fears. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 1022–1035. DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2020.1828110

participants (facilitators and parents) revealed that many of the young participants had high levels of sympathy and empathy for others (Caring) and connection to principles and values (Character). Additionally, most of the young people were described as having a positive connection to family (i.e., siblings, parents, and caregivers), giving them a sense of being cared for, supported, and belonging.

A study that explored the association between the 5Cs and anxiety in youth aged between 15 and 23 years found that increases in anxiety were associated with lower levels of confidence and competence and higher levels of caring and character.¹⁷ Therefore, for the participants the loss of confidence and competence while being high on caring and character are likely to have increased the risk of developing social anxiety. However, the young people's high levels of caring, character and family connection are also protective factors that reduce the likelihood of involvement with negative peer groups and risky behaviours. Therefore, it is proposed that the presence of the protective factors of caring, character and family connection reduces the likelihood of involvement with negative peer groups and risky behaviours. However, socially anxious young people with higher levels of protective factors are more likely to become silently disengaged.

The internet and social media

Research suggests that "excessive internet use has a negative influence on expressing oneself, setting up social relations and other skills needed for individual development."¹⁸ While the internet can help young people feel connected to peers, family, and like-minded people, for young people who are socially disengaged and in need of acceptance it may also be a way to avoid face-to-face interactions. The online connections that are made by the young people are virtual relationships that enable the young person to socialise and be in relationships without feeling the anxiety and the "sense of inadequacy that comes from inter-relational confrontation."¹⁹ However, many studies have shown that the higher the use of the internet by young people, the lonelier they feel.²⁰ In a UK study, four out of five young people said that social media made

¹⁷ Kozina, A., Gomez-Baya, D., Gaspar de Matos, M., Tome, G., & Wiium, N. (2021). The Association Between the 5Cs and Anxiety-Insights from Three Countries: Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 668049. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.668049>

¹⁸ Esen, B. K., Aktas, E., & Tuncer, I. (2013). An Analysis of University Students' Internet Use in Relation to Loneliness and Social Self-efficacy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84, 1504-1508. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.780>.

¹⁹ Morese, R., Palermo, S., Torello, C., & Sechi, F. (2020). Social Withdrawal and Mental Health: An Interdisciplinary Approach. In R. Morese, S. Palermo, & R. Fiorella (Eds.), *Social Isolation - An Interdisciplinary View*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.90735>

²⁰ Esen, B. K., Erken, A., & Tuncer, I. (2013). An Analysis of University Students' Internet Use in Relation to Loneliness and Social Self-efficacy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84, 1504-1508. Retrieved October 2021 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813018545>

their feelings of anxiety worse.²¹ Furthermore, studies of the impact of students using networked technologies during the Covid-19 lockdowns have highlighted the importance of the physical co-presence of others to a sense of belonging.²²

Mental health

The onset of seclusion has been noted to occur at two time points that are associated with transition and major social challenges in the life of an adolescent: the move from primary to secondary school and the transition out of secondary school into work and further education. In addition to struggling with feelings of inadequacy at these vulnerable times, the social isolation created by the Covid-19 pandemic and anxiety over health risks and family employment and income may add to the mental health problems of young people. While social withdrawal can be a risk factor for mental health problems, it may also occur as a complication of an existing mental health disorder. Compared to adults, young people are at higher risk of developing mental health problems, and depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.^{23,24} Among the older adolescents interviewed, some gave poor mental health as a barrier to them attending work or higher education, and for these young people, a higher level of assistance and encouragement was needed to sustain their motivation and attendance on the youth development programme.

The following are examples of quotes that illustrate the concerns that parents and programme participants had around the young person's decreasing confidence and increasing social anxiety, and the negative impact on their levels of engagement and social withdrawal.

"It probably all came to a head last year with her little group of friends. You know, a couple of them from primary school right the way through, and then a stronger one came to the group and the bullying started. And initially she was handling it

²¹ RSPH Status of MIND: social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing

<https://ed4health.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/RSPH-Status-of-Mind-report.pdf>

²² The Conversation Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. (2019). *For teenagers, the internet helps during lockdowns but it's no substitute for the outside world*. Retrieved October 2021 from <https://theconversation.com/for-teenagers-the-internet-helps-during-lockdowns-but-its-no-substitute-for-the-outside-world-151656>

²³ *Adolescent mental health*. (2021). Accessed March 2022 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

²⁴ Loades, M. E., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., Linney, C., McManus, M. N., Borwick, C., & Crawley, E. (2020). Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(11), 1218–1239.e3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009>

very well...we were proud of how she handled it but then came school holidays and she had nobody... her core group had left her, and I think that's when she fell apart."

(Project K Community parent)

"His way of hiding from dyslexia is to be a clown...so people won't look much beyond that. So, the kid is at the back of the classroom, which was [his] case, and he would start crying saying 'I'm not going to school' with tears in his eyes." (Project K Community parent)

"He is a little bit of a bigger built...He is so scared that people are going to judge him for what he looks like. You'll notice that he will tuck in his clothes, he is just so uncomfortable with himself really. And it's such a shame because I know the real [boy]. I would say part shy and almost anxious just consistently anxious in public."

(Project K Community parent)

"He is very much, even if he knows you, he won't give you eye contact, he will be so scared to speak, he has no confidence in his own voice." (Project K Community parent)

"Social media was starting to be a little bit pervasive in her thoughts at home, about what people were talking about her. I think it was more along the lines of just 'she doesn't like me', and 'they are jealous of this', just real weird niggly stuff. And 'No, I don't want to do this', like this love for her sport and then 'I don't want to do {sport} anymore, everybody hates me'." (Project K Community parent)

"She doesn't want to go to school. We are getting a lot of that, a lot of that...disengagement from class, like emails going out saying [she] is not engaged at all." (Project K Community parent)

"He doesn't have a huge social life like kids his age... [He] will prefer to come straight home. He's got friends at school, but he doesn't socialise after school, or any time... Gaming, watching YouTube videos or he is helping me around the house. He'd rather sit at home, or just be at home." (Project K Community parent)

"She spends a lot of time in her own room...she's got a lot of friends online but when it's time to meet up- yeah." (Project K Community parent)

"If his friends call and say, 'do you want to go out to the mall?' he'll just say, 'oh no I'm busy'. He is not busy; he is making himself busy...I'm just so scared that he is going to be in his room until he is 20." (Project K Community parent)

"I want to stop sitting in my room all day, and I want to make money to visit friends overseas." (Career Navigator participant)

"I have left school and am not involved in tertiary education. I have anxiety and talk myself out of trying something new. I want to be like my peers, working and keeping busy." (Career Navigator participant)

"Because for the past two years I've just been sitting in my house and the whole time. I've always been thinking about getting out, but it's just been getting harder and harder the longer I waited." (Career Navigator participant)

"I was like, I don't really want to interact with people much I just want to... like I don't know, I knew I had to interact with people I didn't really want to, so I tried to like, hide in my hoody." (Career Navigator participant)

Figure1. A conceptual diagram of youth silent disengagement. The arrows indicate factors that have a negative impact on the young people's perceptions of self and the corresponding influence on social interactions and disengagement. Also included are some moderating factors (green boxes).

Youth and Silent Disengagement

Learning difficulties (such as dyslexia) that are a barrier to the young person reaching their full potential, socially and academically.

Belonging to a peer group whose negative behaviour does not align with family or personal values.

Body image dissatisfaction.

Adverse Stressful Event

Bullying and ostracism (in person, online, socially and/or verbally).

Disruptions to environment or a sudden change in family circumstances (such as, separation divorce, death or a move to a new city or school).

Experiencing or witnessing family violence.

**Social comparison and negative self-appraisal.
Unfavourable perceptions of self and abilities.**

Decreased social competence and increased social anxiety
Decreased confidence, competence and motivation.

Silent disengagement and social withdrawal.

The young people begin to limit social contact and reduce school engagement, they may also exhibit more disruptive behaviours due in part to a fear of failure.

The growing social isolation reduces opportunities to receive positive reinforcement, enhance resilience, build social networks and to be exposed to alternative perspectives that can challenge their negative cognitions. In time the young person may become more socially anxious and increasingly seclude themselves in their homes.

Levels of caring,
character and
family connection

The internet
and social
media

Mental health

Disengagement and youth development

Essential programme strategies

Thematic content analysis of the qualitative interviews also revealed essential strategies of youth development programmes that can help to bring about positive change and effectively facilitate reengagement.

Adult-youth relationships

A key strategy of Graeme Dingle programmes is connecting young people to positive and supportive adult mentors and programme facilitators. Research has found that in positive youth development programmes “youth who perceived a higher level of trust, mutuality and empathy in their relationship with providers experienced significantly greater improvements in social skills.”²⁵ Characteristics, such as genuineness, caring and empathy, and higher levels of attunement (defined as the capacity to respond flexibly to verbal and nonverbal cues by taking into account others’ needs and desires) have been associated with higher quality relationships and positive behaviour changes.²⁶

The growing social isolation of disengaged youth reduces opportunities to build social networks and to be exposed to alternative perspectives that can challenge negative cognitions about their capabilities. A vital component of working with disengaged youth is connecting them to caring adults so that the young person can experience adults as a source of knowledge and support within their community. In Career Navigator Community, participants are exposed to a diverse range of industry mentors and guest speakers helping them to explore their competencies and job options. In Project K Community, adult mentors help to promote wellbeing, self-efficacy, and resilience and to support the young people to set and work toward realistic positive life goals. The time the young people spend with the adults is centred on the youth interests and personal growth in line with research that shows the most effective programmes are youth centred.²⁷ The adult sharing experiences alongside the participant creates a sense of togetherness, reduced resistance to authority and increased rapport, trust, and openness. A mix of structured and unstructured time with adult mentors and facilitators ensures that required learning is delivered but also that the young people

²⁵ Pryce, J. (2012). Mentor Attunement: An Approach to Successful School-based Mentoring Relationships. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Vol.2910.1007/s10560-012-0260-6

²⁶ Gilkerson, L., & Pryce, J. (2020). The mentoring FAN: a conceptual model of attunement for youth development settings. *Journal of Social Work Practice*. 35(3), 315–330. DOI: 10.1080/02650533.2020.1768516

²⁷ Dworkin, J.B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' Accounts of Growth Experiences in Youth development activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32, 17–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021076222321>

have the opportunity for discussions, giving them access to the information they need at a time that they need it.

Experiential learning

Another key strategy of Graeme Dingle Foundation community programmes is engaging the young people in novel experiential activities with the support of their facilitators and peers. Experiential learning (that is, learning through participation, reflection, generalisation, and application of the learning) engages all the senses, the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social.²⁸ Facilitators guide and encourage the young participants to reflect and transfer the knowledge gained through the experiences to their everyday lives, so lessons are grounded in reality and personal meaning. Many of the activities take place outside the classroom in an environment that does not suggest classroom learning, creating meaningful and authentic experiences. The uniqueness of youth experiential activities and the opportunity to actively construct their own personal change has been found to increase the young participants' levels of motivation, concentration, and cognitive and emotional engagement.²⁹ With cognitive engagement, there is a deeper level of engagement that includes an investment in learning, and with emotional engagement, the young person has an affective reaction to the environment (such as excitement or enjoyment) that includes feelings of belonging.³⁰ More engaged and motivated group members create a more positive and inclusive learning environment and encourage regular attendance as the young people feel like they belong and would be missed by the group if they didn't 'show up' and participate.

Social experience

The presence of peers has been frequently found to be one of the key reasons adolescents participate in youth programmes. However, for disengaged youth, the social aspect of youth programmes can also be a source of anxiety. Therefore, a facilitator with the ability and skills to create a psychologically safe environment is vital to help the young person feel comfortable and to encourage them to interact with others. For young people who have experienced peer rejection and social anxiety, youth programmes can also provide an opportunity to rehearse and gain confidence in their ability to interact in a diverse group.³¹ They learn to handle their own and others'

²⁸ Deane, K., & Harré, N. (2014). The youth adventure programming model. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(2), 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12069>

²⁹ Dworkin, J.B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' Accounts of Growth Experiences in Youth development activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32, 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021076222321>

³⁰ Burnett, F. (2017). *An innovative exploration of engagement using participant observation in an outdoor adventure youth development programme*. Report prepared for the Graeme Dingle Foundation. University of Auckland.

³¹ Deane, K., & Harré, N. (2014). The youth adventure programming model. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(2), 293–308.

emotions, give and take feedback and develop social skills (including working with others, leadership skills and social competencies) that build their confidence and the belief that they can successfully relate to their peers.³² Selected from within a community, the young people are likely to have little or no prior history with the other participants, providing an opportunity to start the programme with a clean slate and to re-invent themselves in an environment where they can experience peer acceptance and belonging. As they share a learning environment and work together on common goals, the young people often form unique relational bonds and a collective identity that provides feelings of belonging and peer acceptance and creates a greater sense of autonomy and independence.

Key programme processes

Person-environment interactions

Research has argued that engagement is important to enhance programme outcomes in youth development programmes, as without engagement the young people are not truly participating. Research examining engagement in the Project K Wilderness Adventure found that matching the environment and the support of others to each young person's unique set of strengths and challenges influenced the extent they experienced engagement and personal growth.³³ An important part of this process is understanding the competencies of each individual and when a young person does or does not need facilitator support. Providing a variety of activities to suit the unique needs of each individual is important to ensure experiences of success and it increases participation through encouraging behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. During programme activities, engagement can vary as young people find it hard to adapt to changes in their environment. Burnett (2017) found that youth who were sensitive to environmental change were particularly vulnerable to disengagement as they struggle to adapt to the environment. Understanding each individual's competencies means that the facilitator is in a unique position to encourage reengagement following periods of disengagement. Also, facilitators knowing what will work with each young person means they are able to encourage the participant to accomplish challenges that the young person may have thought were unachievable.

³² Dworkin, J.B., Larson, R. & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' Accounts of Growth Experiences in Youth development activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32, 17–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021076222321>

³³ Burnett, F. (2017). *An innovative exploration of engagement using participant observation in an outdoor adventure youth development programme*. Report prepared for the Graeme Dingle Foundation. University of Auckland.

Scaffolding learning

An expectation of failure can increase the pressure on disengaged young people facing challenging situations, further increasing their anxiety. The desire by young people to be seen as competent means that youth who have experienced failure despite putting in effort may develop self-protecting behaviours. These disruptive behaviours such as appearing not to care, deliberately going off onto a tangent or acting as if they are too tired to participate mean that the young person may appear to others to be lacking interest and motivation. However, for the young person it is a way “to escape their own fears that they lack the ability to avert failure should they invest the effort necessary to succeed.”³⁴ Scaffolding is an instructional method that moves the young person progressively and with safety nets toward greater independence and understanding. For this group of disengaged young people, scaffolding learning is particularly vital as it enables the young person to return to a safe space when they are feeling anxious and to move slowly and safely from reliance on facilitator support towards greater independence as their confidence and knowledge increases.

Establishing routine

Research on family routines has found that more routines during adolescence are associated with “less alcohol use, greater emotional self-regulation, lower epinephrine levels, and higher rates of college/university enrolment in young adulthood.”³⁵ For adolescents, establishing a routine creates predictability and structure and helps the young person have a sense of control and feelings of security. In this way, routines help to reduce the stress and anxiety that comes with experiencing change and being in an unfamiliar environment. On the programmes, the facilitators give the participants responsibility for routine tasks to encourage the young people towards greater independence and promote self-reliance, time management and self-discipline. Planning and carrying out these responsibilities also teach the young people about cooperation as to schedule and complete the routine tasks, they need to work effectively with other group members.

Teamwork and responsibility

Adolescence is an important time to develop teamwork skills and responsibility. Skills that can reinforce self-esteem and developed early have been shown to have a positive

³⁴ De Castella, K., Byrne, D., & Covington, M. (2013, April 29). Unmotivated or Motivated to Fail? A Cross-Cultural Study of Achievement Motivation, Fear of Failure, and Student Disengagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0032464

³⁵ Barton A. W., Brody, G. H., Yu, T., Kogan, S. M., Chen, E., & Ehrlich, K. B. (2019). The Profundity of the Everyday: Family Routines in Adolescence Predict Development in Young Adulthood. *J Adolesc Health*, 64(3), 340-346. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.08.029. Epub 2018 Nov 2.

impact on future wages and wellbeing.³⁶ During youth development activities the young people report both personal and interpersonal processes of development. Youth development activities require that the participants work together to evaluate, and problem solve in real situations with real consequences that encourage group members to step up and take responsibility.³⁷ Research into these growth experiences found that the activities help to develop group social skills by four processes: learning to work together as a group or team, learning about leadership and responsibility, learning to talk and give feedback, and learning communication skills. The young people say they learn issues of respect for leaders, getting along with those different from you, how different individuals and their personalities affect the group and the benefits of working together. In addition, Dworkin et al. found that during group youth development activities, the young people described themselves as active contributors to the development of their own teamwork and social skills. Supporting research that shows to encourage adolescent learning the most effective adults are not over directive but are responsive and provide appropriate structure, challenge, and support.³⁸

Identity development

The process of interacting with the group and comparing themselves with one another encourages participants to reflect on their identity, important because personal identities “suggest what to do, think and even feel.”³⁹ The process of exploration and identity work comes through the opportunity that youth programmes and activities provide to try new things, learn how these fit with the young person’s developing identity and the self-knowledge gained during the activity, such as learning the limits of their ability. This process of trial and error and self-reflection on who they are, provided by youth development activities, has been described as a principal component of the active process of identity work.⁴⁰ Key to this process of self-reflection is the facilitator who encourages and supports the young person to positively engage with the group

³⁶ Kuhn and Weinberger as cited in D. Karagianni & A. J. Montgomery. (2018). Developing leadership skills among adolescents and young adults: A review of leadership programmes, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 23(1), 86-98, DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2017.1292928

³⁷ Jones, M. R. Impressions from the Wild: A thematic of adolescents’ experience on Project K’s Wilderness Adventure A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology; Massey University.

³⁸ Dworkin, J.B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' Accounts of Growth Experiences in Youth development activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32, 17–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021076222321>

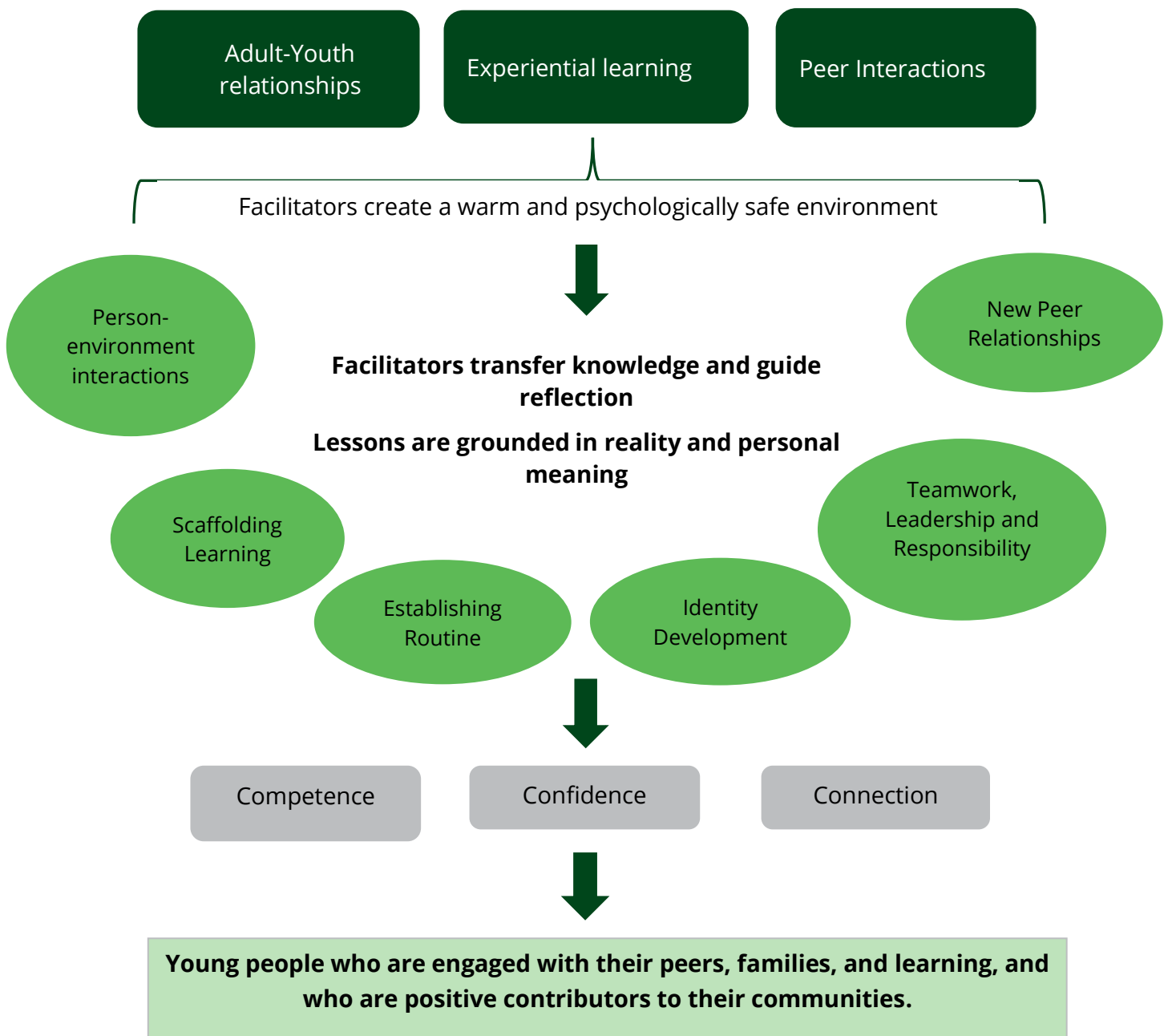
³⁹ Walsh, K., & Gordon, J. R. (2008). *Creating an individual work identity* [Electronic version]. Retrieved October 2021, from Cornell University, School of Hotel Administration site:
<http://scholarship.sha.cornell.edu/articles/582>

⁴⁰ Dworkin, J.B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' Accounts of Growth Experiences in Youth development activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32, 17–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021076222321>

and to recognise their strengths. This process also challenges any negative self-perceptions the young person may have about their social abilities.

The thematic map below (Figure 2) summarises the key strategies and processes identified in the interview data.

Figure 2. Thematic map showing the essential programme strategies (dark green), key programme processes (light green), and short-term and desired intermediate outcomes (in bold).



Outcomes

Lerner's (2010) five Cs of Positive Youth Development (competence, character, caring, connection, and confidence) specify the psychological, behavioural, and social characteristics that indicate youth are thriving. Furthermore, when high levels of the five Cs develop, they help shape the sixth C – contribution, a young person's active participation and contribution to self, community, and society.⁴¹ As discussed earlier in this report, the young people are reported to be naturally caring and compassionate, and to have high levels of character. However, stressful events over time have resulted in low levels of confidence, competence, and connections (with peers, school, and learning).

Thematic analysis of the interview data after the young people had completed key components of Graeme Dingle Foundation youth development programmes revealed that the young people had increased confidence (inner feeling of positive self-worth and self-efficacy), competence (positive view of one's own actions in specific areas, e.g., social, and academic skills) and connection (all positive mutual ties that an adolescent has with significant others and institutions). During the programmes, the facilitators said the high levels of caring and character were apparent. They observed that the groups very quickly formed strong bonds and came together to support group members who were struggling to overcome challenges –

"They really just stuck together and when we started the tramping, when [a participant] was really struggling the group just went around him...I genuinely said I have not seen that in a group before. For the number of days, we were walking...I have only ever seen groups splinter and fracture when that's happened." (Project K facilitator)

Below is a selection of quotes taken from the interviews that show the increases in confidence, competence, and connection, and demonstrate how youth development programmes can contribute to the personal growth of young people and interrupt the process of disengagement.

Competence

"He was really, really happy. He was really delighted to have tried different things that he never had a chance to try, the jumping and climbing off the cliff and these things." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

⁴¹ Explore SEL. (n.d.). *The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development*. Harvard University. Accessed 23rd March 2020. <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/frameworks/52>.

"I feel like sometimes he is 'I got this; I did two weeks on an island'." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"I think that what has been lovely for her is that she has got a bigger sense of herself and on what she knows that she can accomplish. I think that has been a real thing that she has worked on, and I realise that now she believes that and before she said she did, but she didn't really." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"I still hang out with them because they're my mates and stuff but when they vape or do that stuff. I just walk away from them... [Project K] has helped me really walk away from stressful circumstances." (Project K Community participant)

"Being able to talk about how he wants to be spoken to. I think standing up for himself is the biggest thing for him and being able to utilise that without becoming enraged as he used to or shut down. He actually verbalizes how he's feeling, and he does it in a way that's not an emotional thing. It's not crying or upset or angry. He verbalizes it like 'this is what you're doing, this is how it's making me feel, this is what you need to do to make me feel better or fix it'. It's like he goes through those stages." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"[During Covid lockdown, the mentor] helped released some stress in me. It made me concentrate on my work, schoolwork." (Project K Community participant)

"School's been going great. Teacher's been noticing my progress during school and the principal came up to me and said he was proud of my change." (Project K Community participant)

"He actually got to see what it's like to help the community out. One of them he went to was an old person's home, there was an old person he would visit all the time and he's never done anything like that." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

Confidence

"They were totally shy, couldn't get a boo out of them, but to see them, the three stand up and say a speech when they came back, I thought wow!" (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"I think it has made a difference in her confidence. And some of those kids, just the fact that they got up there and the ones that said a couple of lines, it was just extraordinary." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"It's actually quite amazing. Ever since I left the programme I sorted my life out, got a job, counselling to talk about things, feeling more confident. I am working in the

vineyards ... I have made heaps of new friends. I am just more out there, sort of type of thing. I'm not shy and don't hide away from things." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"Just me being able to talk to other people, it's made me feel more confident in myself and when you get more confident in yourself it builds you up and makes you feel like you can literally go and do anything." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"It certainly helped him out. He came back a totally different person than he was. He pretty much came out of his shell. Actually, Project K pretty much pulled him out of his shell. ...If we talked to him before we went to the island, you'd be lucky to get one word. Now he's gabble, gabble. Before Project K, you would've got nothing out of him, now at the end of Project K. He is very confident and no longer shy. One thing that really surprised me was his shyness. He's definitely come out of his shell. I am really thankful for Project K for that" (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"I think he's just so much more confident in himself, I think he's always self-doubted he was never good enough to be around people or he thought he was quite ashamed of his size. He didn't want to talk. I think he's actually realised that he's really funny and people like him, he makes people laugh and he's just really kind of absorbed everything about himself and just let himself out there and not be ashamed of who he is." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

Connection

"The big thing for [her], and maybe other young people I don't know, recognising you don't have to be liked by everyone in the group. It's a huge thing. And I think maybe she is trying to take that to school and trying to take that into different aspects of her life." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"I was very down about myself when the course came in, and I was very cautious about meeting new people and trying to fit in with the course. But, after a couple of lessons I fitted in so well. I started talking to a lot more people and it kind of brought out a new side of me. And it changed how I look at jobs and how I approach them." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"It just changed...they just brought out a new side of me and wanting to talk. Every time I went in there after a couple of lessons I just talked, and I didn't stop talking. My lead to talking for me was building confidence and meeting other people. Just showing that if they can do it, then I can do it." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"Everyone had a good connection, and we could all laugh, and we could all learn together and understand stuff. And if one of us didn't understand something, then it would either be a peer or a mentor or a teacher that could explain it to us ... It made me feel less shy, it made me feel like I could ask questions and I could talk to someone about stuff." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"I can get quiet when I don't understand something, and if I don't feel comfortable asking someone, I just don't. But throughout the whole course if I needed to ask someone something I would. I was not shy about it whatsoever ... it gave me more confidence and the fact that I won't know anyone going into the job I have tomorrow, I don't really think that bothers me much because I can make those great connections and have a great workplace." (Career Navigator Community participant)

"From my family dynamic, it's me and [my son] and my partner and his son and they're out west and we're on the North Shore. It was very much; I went out and spent time with them and [my son] didn't want to come and then I'd spend time with [my son]. My time with [my son] was very separate and now he is, 'can I come? Can we go scootering together?'" My partner on my birthday took him around the viaduct on a scooter and they went off for about three hours. [my son] would've never done that prior. He would be 'all good, I'll stand here', and he wouldn't do anything." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"They mentioned how special it was to feel this bonding like they were helping each other through the difficulties. Some were scared of that, some were scared of this, but they never left anybody behind. They were helping each other and for them that was like, 'oh that's possible'." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

He presents himself to school every day in his number one uniform ... and just that he actually stands with mana. He's up nice and tall, shoulders back and he comes up here in the whare kai, he engages with myself and always asks if I want some help, and he engages with a lot of tua māori outside of the whare kai. So, in terms of confidence, yeah, it's gone ahead leaps and bounds. (Project K whanau class teacher)

"He doesn't lock himself in his room anymore. Okay that was the big thing. Before Project K I was lucky to see him just come out for dinner and the door would get closed and I'd never saw him ... Since Project K, I see him all the time. He even comes and crashes in my space. That's the main thing for me; I get to see my son." (Project K Community parent/caregiver)

"IT WAS LIKE A LIGHT SHONE BRIGHT ON ME, A NEW START."
(Project K community participant)

Summary

In 2020 and 2022, two community programmes (Career Navigator Community and Project K Community) were trialled by the Graeme Dingle Foundation. The aim of the programmes was to extend the reach of Project K to more young people and to provide support for youth who were struggling because of the impact of Covid-19. The Graeme Dingle Foundation is using a Theory of Change evaluation approach to evaluate the efficacy of the two pilot community programmes. As part of the approach, the perspectives of those who have intimate knowledge of the programme are sought and used to reflect on and understand programme processes and outcomes. These are then used to evaluate the programmes and inform programme development in real time. This report presents findings from the thematic content analysis of the qualitative interview data. Presented are the factors leading to the young people's disengagement and social withdrawal, and key strategies and outcomes of youth development programmes. The findings are verified against existing evidence to ensure they are consistent with relevant academic theories.

Common to the lives of the young people are adverse stressful events that occurred at school in early to mid-adolescence. In response, the motivation and confidence of the young people decreased, and their social anxiety increased, resulting in them spending less time with their peers and less time doing activities they once enjoyed. As the young people are not involved in delinquent behaviour or considered to be at risk, parents and caregivers feel isolated while struggling to break this cycle of silent disengagement. This social withdrawal behaviour is consistent with youth 'silent' disengagement that is a growing problem worldwide and in Aotearoa New Zealand. Furthermore, there is increasing concern around the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the wellbeing and mental health of young people, and the resulting increase in the number of young people disengaging from their peers, school, and learning.

Youth development programmes provide opportunities for the growth in confidence and self-efficacy that comes from being challenged and pushed outside one's comfort zone. For disengaged youth, existing levels of anxiety mean that it is vital that the participants' first experience is of a welcoming, inclusive environment and of warm, empathetic facilitators. Novel and authentic experiential activities with the support of adult mentors provide opportunities for the young people to test their abilities, explore their identity and practice teamwork and responsibility, skills the young people can refer to in future challenging situations. Bonding with their peers and group interdependence encourages regular attendance and provides a psychologically safe place for the young people to rehearse and gain confidence in their ability to interact with a diverse group of people. Youth development programmes support the young people to progressively move towards reengagement and greater independence by increasing their confidence, competence, connection, and sense of belonging.



Appendix A

As part of the Theory of Change evaluation, cohorts 3 and 4 completed quantitative measures before the start and at the end of the intensive course component (i.e., eight-weeks delivery of experiential work-ready workshops, industry mentoring and worksite visits). The measures examined participants' career self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, social anxiety, and employment hope.

Descriptive statistics, i.e., means and standard deviations, were calculated for each measure at the two time points. Although the sample size is small ($n = 17$), the quantitative data show clear positive trends with increases in career self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and employment hope, and decreases in social anxiety (see Graph 1 on page 25).

Career self-efficacy

Participants were asked to rate eight career self-efficacy statements on a five-point rating scale where 1 = no confidence at all, 2 = very little confidence, 3 = moderate confidence, 4 = a lot of confidence and 5 = complete confidence. The measure indicated how confident they were in completing tasks such as "Prepare a good resume/CV" and "Perform well in a job interview".

The pre-programme mean for career self-efficacy was 2.86, indicating participants had very little to moderate confidence that they could successfully complete career-related tasks, increasing to a mean of 3.44 at the course, indicating the participants had moderate to a lot of confidence.

Therefore, the participants had more confidence and belief in themselves to make career-related decisions and complete career-related tasks when they finished the programme compared to before they started.

Social interaction anxiety

Participants were asked to rate 13 social interaction anxiety statements on a six-point rating scale ranging from 1 = not at all like me to 6 = very much like me. Examples of the statements are "I get nervous if I have to speak with someone in authority" and "I have difficulty making eye contact with others".

The pre-programme mean for social interaction anxiety was 4.12, indicating that participants were on the higher end of the scale with their levels of anxiety. At the end of the programme, the mean was 3.41, indicating that participants' social anxiety had decreased.

Therefore, participants reported they felt an improvement in their social anxiety levels when interacting with other people and less social interaction anxiety after they had completed the programme than before.

Employment hope

Participants were asked to rate 16 employment hope statements on a six-point rating scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Examples of the statements include “When I think about working, I feel confident that I can do it” and “I’m willing to work hard to reach my career goals”.

The pre-programme mean for employment hope was 4.30, indicating participants were somewhere between ‘somewhat agree’ and ‘strongly agree’, increasing to a mean of 5.21 at the end of the programme.

Therefore, participants felt more positively motivated towards their work and work-related goals when they finished the programme compared to before they started.

Social self-efficacy

Participants were asked to rate eight social self-efficacy statements on a six-point rating scale ranging from 1= not well at all to 6 = very well. Participants were asked to indicate how well they believe they can perform tasks related to relationships, such as “Become friends with other people” and “Cooperate with my classmates”.

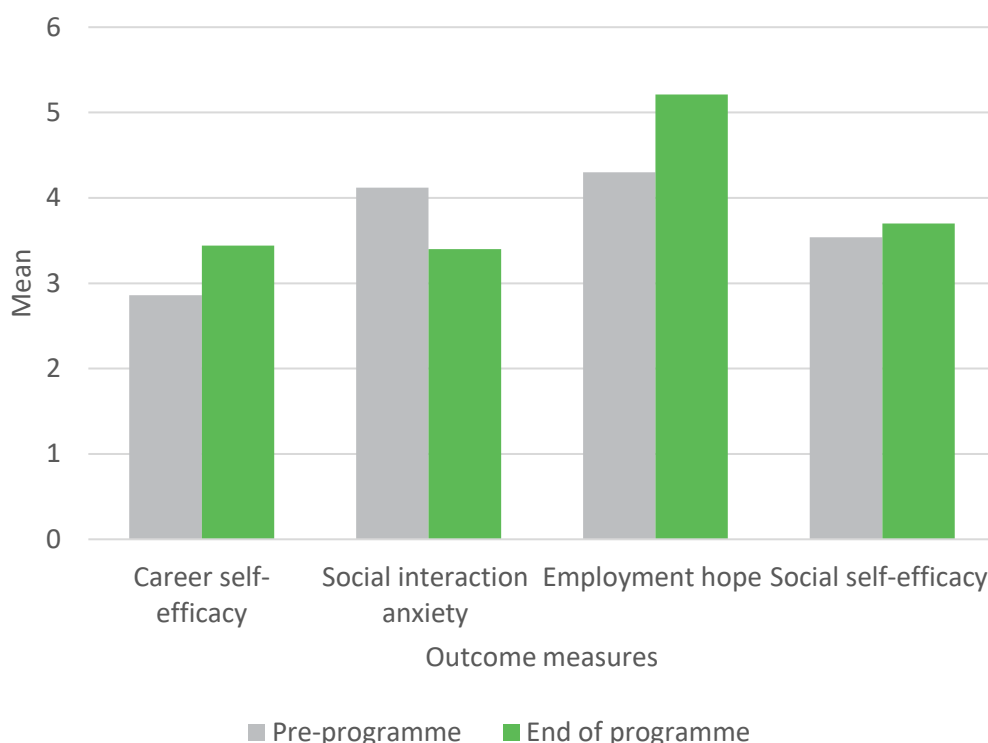
The pre-programme mean for social self-efficacy was 3.54, increasing to a mean of 4.70 at the end of the programme.

Therefore, participants indicated they had stronger self-belief to successfully navigate social interactions when they finished the programme compared to before they started.

Summary

Graph 1 below shows a comparison between the pre- and end-of-programme means for the four outcome measures. There is a clear upward trend in career self-efficacy, employment hope and social self-efficacy, indicating the programme had a positive impact on the participants. The downward trend in social interaction anxiety demonstrates the programmes’ effectiveness in reducing the young peoples’ anxiety levels.

Graph 1. Comparison of pre-programme and end-of-programme means for all four outcome measures.



Although sample sizes are small, paired sample t-testing was carried out to determine if there was a significant difference between the pre-programme and end-of-course means. Two out of the four measures – social interaction anxiety and employment hope – produced p-values of 0.032 and 0.003, respectively. These two p-values are less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference in social interaction anxiety and employment hope from the beginning to the end of the programme. These findings support the qualitative data that shows the Career Navigator Community programme helped to reduce the participants' social anxiety when interacting with other people and increased their hope that they will achieve their career goals and motivation to do so.