



Literature Review

Effective interventions for
vulnerable young people

Summary

26 January 2017

Introduction

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) was contracted to provide strategic support to Vodafone Foundation, to design and implement a strategic review and undertake a literature review to identify:

- The needs of vulnerable young people aged 12 to 24 years, and
- Key risk factors and interventions effective in supporting positive life-course outcomes across several categories including education, economic opportunity, health and safety, and security.

For the purposes of this review, the most vulnerable young people are defined as:

- Male offenders (particularly Māori)
- Young people with health, disability or special needs
- Young females receiving state support/sole parent (particularly Māori)
- Mental health users (particularly with child agency/school issues history)
- Low socio-economic status (particularly Māori)
- Long term disability beneficiaries

The review also identifies opportunities for effective philanthropic investment to support improved outcomes for vulnerable young people. A summary of current trends related to young people is also appended to this summary.

Key Findings

Analysis of the information gathered for this report is compiled under the following three key finding areas.

Finding 1: Risk factors

There is a clear set of risk factors that predispose young people to experience poor future outcomes.

Dynamic childhood risk factors of schooling, tertiary education, work and welfare, early corrections contact, early use of mental health services and early parenting are key factors in predicting poor future outcomes for young people.

Some vulnerable youth are more at risk than others.

Vulnerable young people have a higher risk of experiencing poor future outcomes across all domains of education, health, employment and greater chance of contact with the justice, corrections, health and social welfare systems. Within this group of vulnerable young people, those at more risk are likely to be young Māori and Pasifika males, young parents and young people with disabilities or special needs.

Level of deprivation (closely associated with area of residence) is clearly linked to poor future outcomes. While the proportions of young people at risk are higher in some smaller districts (e.g. Kawerau, Opotiki and the Far North) the greatest numbers of youth at risk can be found in larger urban areas such as Manukau City and Christchurch. Pockets of extreme need are found in Kawerau and Wairoa.

Māori and Pacific ethnic groups experience higher levels of deprivation typically having poverty rates around double those of the European/Pākehā group.

Finding 2: Effective interventions

What doesn't work? The research is clear that some approaches are more effective for working with vulnerable young people and their families/whānau than others.

Some types of programme interventions are less effective in reducing poor outcomes for young people in general, including:

- Short-term strategies;
- School-based programmes (delivered by external providers) that are not part of an integrated school approach;
- Boot-camps and similar programmes;

- Poor quality programme implementation;
- Moral/shaming appeals to change behaviour; and
- Those not including skill development or involving families/whānau.

What works? Youth mentoring programmes, youth offender interventions, alternative education programmes, intensive employment training programmes, teen parent support and mental health promotion can all be effective given quality implementation and particularly as part of multi-service, holistic wraparound services.

- **Youth Mentoring Programmes** are effective for youth with low or mixed economic background and/or high risk youth for preventing illegal drug and alcohol use and reducing truancy. These programmes are less effective in reducing contact with juvenile justice systems, when after school programmes target youth at risk. There is mixed evidence for their effectiveness in reducing youth violence. They should not be one-off programmes, have infrequent contact, be less than six months' duration or use peer (instead of adult) mentors.
- There is a wide range of **youth offender interventions** but in general effective interventions include:
 - A focus on risk factors in key social environments and needs;
 - Match the level of intervention to the offender's risk of reoffending;
 - Include an educational component;
 - Increase social bonds and set clear goals in collaboration with participants.

In general, less effective youth offender interventions are:

- School-based programmes;
- Arresting young offenders;
- “Boot camp” and “Scared Straight” type programmes and
- Approaches with few contact hours for high-needs offenders or intensive programmes for low-needs offenders.
- In general, **alternative education interventions** such as Activity Centres, Services Academies and Teen Parent Units are mostly effective. However, effectiveness is dependent on quality learning programmes and plans, quality connections to schools and good leadership.
- Policy-level intervention can assist in producing more positive **employment** outcomes for young people. These include:
 - greater institutionalisation of pathways between schools and industry
 - efficient matching of young job seekers with jobs and
 - intensive targeted assistance to those most at risk of long term unemployment.

Effective **employment training programmes** are those that are high quality, intensive, potentially long-term and involve highly skilled and committed staff.

- Access to quality sexuality and relationship education and support for contraceptive use can prevent teenage pregnancies. For **young parents**, parenting and home visiting programmes are effective in producing positive outcomes for mother and child and teen parent units in schools are effective in producing more favourable educational outcomes for teen parents.
- **Effective mental health promotion/drug alcohol early intervention** includes:
 - Strategies designed to improve family relationships
 - School-based programmes that teach cognitive strategies, emotional and social skills designed to assist in regulating emotions and that are at least one year in duration.

Programmes need to have multiple components, be positive and holistic, be whole school-wide and part of a whole school approach. Youth one stop shops are effective as single points of entry to multiple services.

Principles for effective service delivery

Principles for more effective delivery of services for young people with multiple, high and complex needs include services delivery that is:

- Multi-level and ecologically complex;
- Evidence-based;
- Coordinated;
- Continuous and provides seamless delivery of a continuum of services;
- Inclusive of users in their design and of family and community in implementation; and
- Culturally competent.

Effective strategies for youth intervention programmes are those that:

- Foster positive outcomes and relationships for children, youth and their whānau;
- Have multiple components;
- Use a big picture approach addressing community and policy influences;
- Contain purposeful activities to build life skills and opportunities to use those skills;
- Provide opportunities for entrepreneurship, leadership and community contribution; and
- Foster a sense of altruism and contribution to society.

Effective interventions for rangatahi and their whānau are those that place whānau at the centre of service design and delivery and empower whānau as a whole, such as those based on Whānau Ora principles.

Finding 3: Options for philanthropic funders

This high-level review has identified the principles and characteristics of interventions which are more likely to be successful in positively changing outcomes for vulnerable young people. As the review is high level as intended, it is not possible to point to any specific interventions or programmes in which Vodafone should invest. Furthermore, the evidence evaluation itself is light in some areas (for example, effectiveness of programmes aimed at Pasifika young people) and practice-based studies are difficult to find.

Opportunities for effective philanthropic investment to support improved outcomes for vulnerable young people need to (i) be aligned with Vodafone's strategic intent (ii) be mindful of the characteristics of programmes or interventions most likely to be effective (identified below) and (iii) include evaluation.

It is probable that greater impact may be achieved for vulnerable young people by a combination of investment in specific interventions, supported by higher level effective advocacy for ecosystem change to improve (for example) employment and education opportunities for all young people.

Strategic focus on vulnerable young people, their whānau/families

There is opportunity for philanthropic funders to have strategic focus areas which would benefit from both higher-level advocacy and specific investment:

- **Early intervention** (children and younger young people) as key to increasing the likelihood of positive future outcomes for vulnerable young people, and
- **Māori rangatahi** as the fastest growing population group and being over-represented in experiencing poor(er) outcomes, measures to support rangatahi are a clear priority. Opportunities for philanthropic funders include supporting strategies to combat institutional and cultural racism, and increasing access for rangatahi to culturally and clinically competent services and kaupapa Māori services.

Focus on interventions to meet the needs of vulnerable young people and their whānau/families

There is clear evidence from the literature that various types of programmes and interventions targeting vulnerable young people can have a positive impact on young people and their whānau/family. However, there is no easy quick fix solution, and a holistic, long-term approach is required. The characteristics of effective interventions are those that:

- **Integrate social services** (multi-agency responses) with a single point of entry. These are both required and effective for youth and families with high, complex and multiple needs. Opportunities for philanthropic funders including supporting

interventions or programmes that are components of a more encompassing holistic, wraparound service.

- Have high **quality of the programme implementation**. This is critical to the effectiveness of the intervention (including quality of staff, staff access to training and adherence to programme principles). Opportunities for philanthropic funders include supporting the integration of school-based programmes delivered by external providers into whole school approaches and resourcing to ensure high quality programme implementation.
- Involve the young person's family/whānau and wider community as appropriate.

Bigger picture: building supportive policy and advocacy

There is a clear link between deprivation and future poor outcomes. At the policy and advocacy level, it is worthwhile for philanthropic funders to consider ways in which policies and measures that address the disparity between life-course outcomes for the wealthier and poorer segments of society can be advocated for and supported.

Opportunities for philanthropic funders include working with iwi, local government, advocacy organisations to develop policies and strategies to assist in ensuring people can engage effectively in employment achieved through education and skill development.

Further investigation on the potential of institutionalising links between industries and schools, and more effective labour market policies and strategies targeting young people would also be beneficial in this area.

Investing in evaluation

Philanthropic funders are potentially well positioned to invest in evaluation, particularly of innovative interventions. Building the capacity of community organisations to develop reflective practice and implement evaluation would assist in increasing the knowledge base of what constitutes effectiveness.

From reviewing the evidence, it is clear there is a substantial amount of evaluation in some areas (e.g. youth justice), while other areas are lacking such evaluation necessary to increase the knowledge base of effective interventions. Specifically, more evaluation is required:

- On the needs of young people with special needs and disabilities and related effective interventions;
- Measuring the effectiveness of interventions aimed at rangatahi and Pasifika youth; and
- Measuring long term outcomes associated with alternative education and trade academies

Types of investment

Internationally, the focus of philanthropy has shifted in the past decade from a more traditional, issue-based focus with unknown or non-attributable impacts to a **more strategic or systemic** focus that recognises the opportunity that foundations and trusts have to accelerate change, lead social progress and tackle root causes with a better understanding of the differences made.

The **impact investment** model has the potential to change the wider social impact sector significantly. The concept of impact investing describes the use of financial investment to generate measurable social or environmental impacts alongside financial returns. Impact investment has grown rapidly and is expected to grow further.

The following figure (4) provides examples of the types of investment opportunities that the Vodafone Foundation could make in relation to the priorities identified in this report:

Figure 4. Examples of investment opportunities

Traditional philanthropy	Strategic Philanthropy	Innovative/ Systemic Philanthropy	Impact Investment
Support of specific programmes and interventions that follow effective principles of practice for vulnerable young people.	Targeting priority outcomes for vulnerable young people in longer term partnership with service providers and other funders. Investing in community organisation evaluation capacity building and other evaluation	Addressing systemic risk factors for vulnerable young people including advocacy at policy level e.g. deprivation. Place-based interventions e.g., Northland and other areas of identified highest need.	Investment opportunities to achieve priority outcomes including prototyping innovative interventions and approaches.

Appendix A Summary: Current outcome trends for young people in Aotearoa NZ

Mental Health

In 2014, the rate of youth suicides in NZ dropped to 13.9 per 100,000 below the rate of suicide among people aged 25–44 years for the first time since 2007, continuing the decreasing trend for this age group since 2012 (www.health.govt.nz), but NZ has the highest rate of youth suicide in the OECD (www.oecd.org). The rate of suicide is higher for Māori males (21.7 per 100,000 cf to 15.2 non-Māori males and higher for Māori than non-Māori females (7.2 cf. 4.7) (www.health.govt.nz).

Compared with other age groups, young people in NZ have: high rates of mental illness, high rates of alcohol and drug use and abuse (particularly among young men) and, high rates of sexually transmitted infections (www.health.govt.nz).

Drugs and Alcohol

Despite legal restrictions, young people in New Zealand are also consumers of drugs. 18% of people aged 16 to 17 years reported being smokers and 24.8% (of 16-17 year olds) report using cannabis in the last year (www.nzdrugfoundation.org.nz).

Smoking rates for 15 to 17 year olds more than halved from 16% to 6% between 2006/7 and 2014/15. The rate of Maori smoking is 2.8 times higher than for non-Maori and higher in females than males. 57% of 15- to 17-year-olds drank alcohol in the past year, a large decrease from 75% in 2006/07 (www.health.govt.nz)

Education

The percentage of people aged 18 years with a minimum of NCEA Level 2 or an equivalent qualification increased between 2006 and 2011 (www.education.govt.nz):

- Pakeha/European 69% vs 74.1%
- Māori 34% vs 49.6%
- Pasifika 40% vs 59.6%

Teen pregnancy

While NZ still has a comparatively high teenage birth rate when compared internationally, since 2013 the rate of teenage pregnancies has declined, with the decline greatest for younger teenagers. The teenage birth rate is declining for Māori but the Māori teenage birth rate is still higher (53 births per 1000) than the national rate (23 births per 1000) (www.superu.govt.nz).

Crime

In 2016, the number of children (10-13 years) and youth (14-16) convicted of crime continued to decline (by 47% since 2010/11), although the proportion who are Māori has increased (by 15% since 2005/6) (www.justice.govt.nz).

A third of adults convicted for crime are between the ages of 17 and 24 years. 41% of adults convicted are Māori (however, this is a reduction of 20% since 2010/11) compared to 37% European and 10% Pasifika. (www.justice.govt.nz).

Employment

The proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is used as an indicator of youth disengagement. As of March 2016, the NEET rate for Māori aged 15-24 years was 21%, compared to 17% for Pasifika youth and 9% for European youth. (www.mbie.govt.nz).

In 2016, the NZ Youth Unemployment Rate was 11 percent, continuing a downward trend since 2010 (www.tradingeconomics.com). NZ is ranked just below the average of the OECD countries for youth unemployment (www.oecd.org).