TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
FOR
YOUTH SUCCESS

Center
for the
Study
of
Social
Policy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a great deal of attention to the policy choices that could lead to improved outcomes for youth facing significant adversity. Discussion has focused largely on finding the right interventions, identifying and spreading programs that have evidence of effectiveness ("evidence-based programs"). It has also touched upon better methods of public management (for example in contracting for services); the importance of prevention; and the value of centering work with youth on their interests and abilities ("strengths-based practice"). But the power of *relationships* to change lives has been nearly invisible.

The partners in the project, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in the United States and the Dartington Social Research Unit in the United Kingdom, came together to study *transformational relationships* between youth and workers, in settings ranging from large human services agencies working with youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to quite small efforts to help youth dealing with homelessness and substance abuse problems. They did so because each had done prior work that, in unexpected ways, highlighted the importance of relationships for youth.

CSSP, in developing its Youth Thrive™ initiative, identified a group of organizations doing extraordinary work with young people in difficult circumstances. It found that many of them focus intently on relationships between workers and youth, and believe that those relationships are at the heart of change. Dartington, in undertaking a two-year investigation for the Lankelly Chase Foundation into the nature of support needed by young people who face multiple, severe challenges, interviewed young adults who had such problems and who had succeeded in improving their lives. They found that many of the youth explained those changes as resulting from a relationship with an individual worker who believed in them; kept showing up even when they were in trouble; challenged them to make better decisions without judging them; and helped them begin to make better relationships with peers and other adults.

These findings were intriguing for two reasons. First, CSSP and Dartington were accustomed to hearing relationships described, when they were discussed at all, in instrumental terms. Relationships were a tool for "engagement," and might be needed to get youth to enroll in service programs and then to continue attending. Instead, we were hearing that the right relationship could itself be the primary driver of change, and could have a transformational effect.

Second, while the agencies that CSSP and Dartington examined are private non-profit organizations, the majority of them are accountable to the demands and rules of large, complex public systems. These systems can, despite their good intentions, make the work of building relationships very difficult. Systems make rules. Each rule on its own may well be perfectly sensible, and in fact reflect what we would want to happen to our own children if they were in trouble. But all of the sensible rules added together draw energy towards compliance, towards hours spent with paperwork rather than with people, towards conversations that are about gathering the information needed to fill in the forms rather than getting to know the person. Yet here were examples of service providers working within these systems that were nevertheless able to prioritize relationships and to succeed at them remarkably often, and young people saying that these relationships were an important influence, sometimes the most important influence, on their ability to improve their lives.

Accordingly, the two organizations decided to learn more about relationships powerful enough to help youth begin to think, feel and act differently. They joined together to study three questions:

1. ***How do transformational relationships work?*** What do workers do in these relationships? What are the mechanisms by which young people are helped to change as a result?

2. ***What are the attributes of workers who are particularly good at creating transformational relationships?*** Can we distinguish those characteristics that need to be present at the time of hire from those that can be developed on the job?

3. ***What are the attributes of organizations that successfully promote transformational relationships?*** How do they do that, across a broad range of functions such as hiring, training, supervision, management and accountability, and organizational culture?

These three research questions also have implications for the larger question of how systems can, at minimum, avoid getting in the way of relationships and, at best, actively promote them.

The study entailed more than 80 interviews, with youth, workers and organizational leaders, conducted in the both the United States and the United Kingdom. The next section reports on the study findings, illustrated with the words of young people and the adults who work with them. We then turn to reflections and recommendations for the changes in policy and practice, in both service-providing organizations and public systems, that could benefit many young people. The study methodology is described in detail in the Appendix.

Findings

In this section, we describe the themes prominent in our interviews. We begin by taking two views of transformational relationships. The first is an outside view, describing what an observer, watching such a relationship develop, would be likely to hear and see. The second perspective is an inside view – an effort to understand what is happening within a young person during such a relationship. We then move on to describe what we learned about the attributes of workers who excel at relationships and of organizations that succeed at creating a context within which relationships flourish.

What happens in transformational relationships: looking in from outside

As workers described what they do in order to create a transformational relationship with youth, and youth described what happened from their point of view, we regularly heard about the following worker behaviors that helped to build the relationship.

1. Listening. Transformational relationships **start with youth being heard.** "Listening" was mentioned over and over throughout our interviews, and listening more also meant that workers talked less.

> We just talk. We just talk. We just talk, like me and you would talk, and more importantly we actually listen. (Worker, UK)

> People will tell you anything when you first meet them. It's insane. If you get them going, they'll tell you who their rival is, who shot them, who they – it's crazy. People want to be heard, and people want to be seen, and nobody does that for them. If you can make them feel special, they will tell you anything, and they are all special. (Worker, US)

> People know even when you listening or you not listening. People know when you give a shit or you don't. (Worker, UK)

Listening often entailed pushing beyond the boundaries of "the case." Workers spoke of how they tried to make sure that they formed their impressions of a young person based on their first-hand experience, rather than by reading a case record.[1] They talked about knowing the person they're helping in ways that go beyond their needs for services.

> ... my supervisor {said} "It sounds as if you know her, but you don't really know her." And I was like "okay..." And then she asks me, "What was her favorite TV show? What does she like to do on the weekends? What are her friendships like? Like does she have friends?" and I was like "I don't know, I didn't ask those questions" ... we literally went to McDonalds on the block and we sat down and I was like "I want to get to know you, tell me a little bit about you." She went on about school and employment, and I was like "No no no, what do you like to do, what do your friends do?" And she started opening up... (Worker, US)

This openness helped build relationship, especially when youth felt that the worker was **listening without judging** – that is, without judging the youth as good or bad. Workers might hear about problematic behaviors that they would need to challenge, but those challenges could come later, in the context of a relationship, rather than during early encounters.

> I feel like I can be myself because she knows me and she's not judging me. And like, because she knows everything about me, do you know what I mean? Like... So yes, I feel like I can be myself around her. (Youth, UK)

> The first thing I told her was about my kid, which was the whole point of being there, to learn more about my kid, than me and how I feel. But when I told her about that, she seemed to be, all right, you know, I'm not judgmental. So I got to tell her more about myself, more about what I'm going through and that, and that's why I decided to tell her more about my mental health and where I'm living. (Youth, UK)

> He understood me. He understood I wasn't just a monster, this animal. He knew I was a good person. (Youth, US)

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[1] A recent publication by a group of youth advocates in Vermont includes, as one of its rules for working with youth, "Our files can't tell you who we are - we're much better at doing it ourselves."

2. Persistence over time. Transformational relationships take time, in two ways. The first is the intensive time often needed at the beginning - the sheer persistence needed to reach someone who may not be eager to be reached (sometimes, quite literally, to get a foot in the door). Workers spent many hours, over the course of weeks or even months, establishing the initial connection. They had to be resilient enough to tolerate numerous rejections without taking them personally, and to keep on trying. We heard many stories illustrating this commitment to be "relentless."

> For the past two months or however long it's been, I've been the one who's calling, calling, calling, going to his house, going to his house, going to his house, calling him, trying to help him figure out a way. Even though he's – doesn't buy it, doesn't really want to work with me, doesn't want to turn himself in, all that stuff, when he's in trouble, who does he call? He gets probably one person to call, and he calls me. That's really the beginning of the transformational relationship. (Worker, US)

The second is the *extensive* time and patience needed, over a period of months, for a relationship to develop at its own pace. The course is rarely smooth. Young people may engage for a time, then move away, then approach again, slowly increasing their trust and openness to the worker.

> … you're in there for the long-haul, you know. They have so many people who just pop into life and disappear, and so just realizing that you are going to keep being there … So just not giving up on somebody really, not running away because they're not reacting right… (Worker, UK)

> And it's chipping away, chipping away, chipping away. (Worker, UK)

> … it's OK not to always be achieving something tangible with someone. Trust that time, and that time spent with someone, will lead to something. It might take a while, it might be quite quick. But time has got a lot of power, I think. (Worker, UK)

3. Being "real." Many young people used this word when describing workers with whom they had formed a strong relationship. It most often meant that the worker had told the youth enough about him or herself to be seen as a whole person, not just someone filling a job role. In many instances what the worker had said conveyed an understanding of the youth's background, whether from having had similar experiences growing up or through relationships with other youth. It also included finding other points of connection, as simple as a shared allegiance to a sports team or a favorite musician.

> It's not just a one-sided thing… you think, "Okay I'm gonna get to know you and you're going to know nothing about me." That's impossible, that's not a real relationship. (Worker, US)

> Just be yourself, because the last thing you want is to pretend to be somebody you're not … you know they see right through you… (Worker, UK)

Some workers shared more, others less, and it was clear that there were important boundaries to be observed (particularly, ensuring that the worker was not implicitly asking the youth for help in working out his or her own difficulties).

Numerous youth described these relationships as being like family or social relationships, real or idealized. They said that workers acted towards them like a parent, an older sibling, or a friend.
By contrast, the way they described these relationships also implies that for these youth some other relationships with workers had not been "real."

4. Challenging the Youth. Transformational relationships involve challenging the youth. We asked youth to rate, on a scale from one to ten with ten denoting complete agreement, a number of behaviors of the workers with whom they had formed strong relationships. Young people consistently affirmed the statements that their worker "pushes me to do better" and "confronts me when necessary." Remarkably often, their reply to these prompts was "ten," accompanied by vigorous nodding and a smile. On the other hand, the statement that the worker "feels sorry for me" elicited by far the lowest ratings of any of the attributes.

> … if he felt sorry for me, he would have never gave me criticism in order for me to better myself… He would just let me fail, I guess. (Youth, US)

> I said, "You will be pissed off at me," and I said, "You're going to be upset at me. You're going to be pissed off at me because if I respect you enough and I want what's best for you, I'm going to have to do the hard things and say the hard things to you." (Worker, US)

> You might not like what I'm saying, but I'm going to be here, and I'm going to say it because I love you and I care about you. If I didn't say it, I'd be doing you a disservice. (Worker, US)

These challenges did not come at the very beginning of a relationship – not until it was clear that the worker cared about the youth and was not judgmental, and thought the youth would be able to recognize the difference between challenging an action and judging a person. But we were convinced that they are essential, not optional; the relationship would not become transformational until it survived difficult feelings and complicated conversations in addition to times of connection.

> You build trust because something's gone wrong and then you realise that oh it's okay… it takes a little argument or a little misunderstanding or something to realise oh they're okay you know. You had an argument and you still survived, great. Whereas if everything's just fine you never really know what's (what), you know… (Organization leader, UK)

5. Showing up in crises. In transformational relationships, workers take ***advantage of crises*** to build trust. Bad things had happened to many of the young people we interviewed. One youth described having been locked out of a foster home, another having been robbed and seriously injured in her neighborhood. They did not have relatives or friends whom they could count on to help with these crises. When this happened, workers who showed up, stayed with them, and helped them get through the problem built a great deal of trust.

Perhaps more remarkably, we saw the same dynamics in play when crises resulted from choices made by the young people themselves. They might make mistakes, sometimes serious ones, even when their lives had started to get better. These errors had emotional consequences as well as practical ones. Youth felt ashamed, and might therefore back away from relationships, afraid that they might now be rejected and afraid of their own feelings. We were impressed by how often the workers we met had nevertheless been able to turn these moments into positive turning points that both supported the youth's growth and strengthened the relationship.

> Some of these young men have never had someone show up when they fail. When they failed at something, and oftentimes they will, that's when we like to say we do our best youth work. When they've failed at something that we've assisted them in getting into it, and they start to have this extreme thinking of, "I'm a failure. See? I told you I didn't want to do that," or "I ain't trying that again," or "It's all right, man. Never mind." If they're not answering phone calls or whatever, we're still knocking on doors and showing up, and we're letting them know it's okay. That's a part of real life, failure. There's nothing wrong with you. You're not a failure. You're not stupid. You just didn't pass this time. You just failed this time, but you're not a failure. (Worker, US)

6. Love. Love is not a word that features often in discussions of public policy or scientific inquiry. Moreover, it raises red flags – fears of boundaries being erased, of workers being over-involved with or taking advantage of those who depend upon them. But in our interviews, a surprising number of people (both youth and workers) talked about love, and others talked about "caring" in a way that sounds very much like love.

> I hadn't experienced love in like a really long time and that's what I got from her. (Youth, UK)

> I always think about when I was in the streets, who was there to care for me, you feel me? Now I got a lady now that, man, she actually cares, so I'm like, I can't – I'm not going to hold nothing back from you. (Youth, US)

> I think what always gets them back is that they know that they matter to you, that you love and care about them. Even when they're spitting in your face angry, it's the same as when you're spitting in your face angry at your parent. We're not parents, but it's the same type of feeling, like, "I know they're going to be there. I'm angry because what they're saying is right, and it hurts me…" (Worker, US)

What happens in transformational relationships: looking out from inside

Young people who have experienced adversity are often described (too often, defined) in terms of their external circumstances (for example, they are homeless, or are in the foster care system) or their actions (they have left school without graduating, developed an addiction, have engaged in criminal behavior, or have become teen parents). In this section we report on how youth talked about themselves, especially their feelings and their self-perception, and how these changed over the course of a transformational relationship.

Challenges

1. Stress. The first theme that stood out about the lives of these young people prior to the transformational relationship is the overwhelming amount of stress they had to deal with, and the extent to which they had to focus on getting through each day with the least possible damage, physical or psychological. (An executive of one of the organizations visited, reviewing a draft of this paper, commented about the phrase "overwhelming amount of stress," "This is an understatement.") For many of the youth we interviewed, stress had at least for a time virtually defined how they lived.

> I was thinking I'm doing what I need to do to survive. I don't care what anybody thinks because they're not in my shoes. (Youth, US)

> I just felt like I was meant to have this life where I was just surviving, but that's all… (Youth, UK)

> … a year ago, I didn't feel proud. I was making myself sick and I was, you know, just like, just being. I weren't living. I weren't… I was surviving. (Youth, UK)

2. Difficulty of experiencing and recognizing emotions. Even for youth who have not experienced significant adversity, adolescence is a time of conflicting and confusing emotions. This ordinary challenge was made extraordinary by the difficulties in the lives of the youth we met. As a result they may have been angry much of the time, found ways to numb themselves, or avoided contact with others.

> … it was a lot of just like blind anger at that point and I cannot recall a lot of what I did. It was such a haze of not doing what I was doing, only what I was trying to do and that I was failing to do it. (Youth, US)

> … I didn't really interact with a wide variety of people. I kept to myself most of the time … it's not really a problem if you can like you know keep it under wraps and control it. (Youth, US)

> She does not know how to be happy. She does not know how to be sad. She does not know what emotions are because for so long she had just been existing. (Worker, UK)

3. Negative self-perception and shame. Again and again, youth recalled feeling that they didn't matter to others, that they were all messed up, and even that they didn't matter to themselves.

I hated myself. I didn't think I deserved to be alive. (Youth, UK)

I was a mess, I was just a mess … I was ashamed of myself. Like, the way I was. Like, when it comes to like, the appearance, I could always play the part … but when it comes to the feelings and how you feel about yourself, it's not good. It's not good. (Youth, UK)

They would say I'm a troublemaker. I'm always in jail. They would say I had too many chances to get right. They would say I'm a waste of talent. I've got too much potential. That's really it. If you don't want to be bothered, just leave him alone. He's got an attitude problem. (Youth, US)

Shame is everything here. There is so much baggage of shame that that they can barely walk straight. There is extreme thoughts of I'm stupid all the time. I'm fat …. I am not loved. I'm a bad mother. There are lots of extreme thoughts. What am I doing in this country? I thought this would be different. I failed. I failed, right? (Worker, US)

…how strong the shame is. It's like the weight of the world. (Organizational leader, US)

4. Powerlessness and lack of agency – that is, the sense that one's own actions make a difference to future life chances and options. Many of these young people did not believe that they had meaningful choices to make or that they had much of a say in their own future.

I didn't know there was a way to fix things. (Youth, UK)

Occasionally you will have clients that don't even have a goal, so planning is out of the bloody window. So then it's just the relationship in the hope that something will come, you know? (Worker, UK)

How Change Happens

The themes just described – overwhelming stress, difficulty experiencing and managing emotions, shame, not believing that they could influence their own future - were reported to us by youth looking back on an earlier part of their lives, and by workers thinking back on what youth were like at the beginning of the relationship. By contrast, descriptions of the current state of the same young people were very different. They still faced a great deal of stress, and many still struggled with their feelings, but they were no longer overwhelmed. They believed that they had important choices to make and that those choices would help to determine their future. These changes had produced important practical consequences, such as returning to school or getting and keeping a job, maintaining stable housing, and beginning to repair relationships. Youth began to form different self-perceptions; while many had regrets over things they had done, they now also expressed pride in themselves and they were convinced that they had changed for the better. We turn next to their description of how these changes happened.

1. Mattering. The transformational relationship helped *youth see that they matter.*

I would go missing for a couple of weeks and she'll still call me like, what's up? Come back in … anybody else, they could've been just like, just go to jail. Just go back to jail… We don't care about your life right now, but she wouldn't. She will keep, stay in touch, like, come back in. Just do this class. Get re-hired. Get back on the crew… (Youth, US)

...so the first part of it is we show up enough for them, to help them understand they matter, until they start understanding themselves that they matter. (Organization leader, US)

These young people that are struggling, they're no different to anybody else's kids. Like, they want to matter and they want to be seen and they want to know they're important to somebody. (Organization leader, US)

It was a surprise to find that someone thought that they matter. It was a bigger surprise when this turned out to be more than just words: when a worker showed up even when the youth did not want to see them; showed up again and again; kept showing up even after the young person had done something wrong; showed up when not expected (to celebrate even a small accomplishment, or to help during a crisis); and challenged the youth about negative behaviors when it might be easier to say nothing. All of these experiences differed from what the youth had come to take for granted – that they didn't matter, and that anyone allowed to become important would soon leave. Eventually, the young people began to matter more to themselves.

2. Imagining a Different Future. As they mattered more to themselves, ***youth saw that things could be different.*** When you don't matter enough, to yourself or others, it's hard to imagine that what you do or don't do matters. These young people described how, as they started to matter more, they began to reflect on their lives in a way they had not been able to do earlier. Changes in circumstances could play an important role in supporting this change, as a young person who now had a safe place to sleep, a job, or another chance in school was less overwhelmed and had more space to reflect.

I think I needed that push off someone to help for me to realise that I can help myself. (Youth, UK)

Back then ... I just went right to it. If he wanted to fight, I would fight with him. If it were to happen now, I would have certain people in the back of my head – {worker's name} is one of them – who reminds me that there's other ways to not get sucked into that, to think about the consequences. (Youth, US)

You're cooperating with him to achieve something. It doesn't matter what, to be honest. (Worker, UK)

3. Emerging Sense of Power and Agency. As they began to see and act upon possibilities, ***young people gained (or re-gained) agency and experienced pride.*** They came to recognize how their choices make a difference in their lives, and that when the difference is a positive one they can take credit for it. This reinforced the sense that they do indeed matter.

Altogether, (worker) didn't do a thing for me, but she did, do you know what I mean? But everything I'd done she made sure I'd done it for myself and that she didn't do it for me. (Youth, UK)

I don't know for sure what's going to happen but it's up to me what's going to happen and it's not just going to be some disastrous thing and now I can look at things like that without just freaking out. Which is pretty nice. (Youth, US)

...because he started achieving and started making small changes, they become bigger changes. I think it's confidence and self-esteem. And, you know, a lot of self-worth again. Because, you know, we know people don't think they're worthy of us sort of being in their lives and actually being there and staying there. (Worker, UK)

4. Capacity to Self-Regulate. Through these changes, *youth began to slow down and became better able to regulate themselves.* They were more often able to respond to challenges in ways that, at least, didn't get them into trouble, and at best, became another source of pride.

I definitely changed a lot. Like I mentioned before, I think before I talk. (Youth, US)

In the past I used to just if something happened I'd just – bang take off, start flipping, causing a brawl everywhere, but now if something happens I take a step back and I think about what can go wrong and what can go right and then go with the right bit. (Youth, UK)

Now when somebody's disrespecting me, a big golf ball just goes in my throat. I just can't say anything. Nothing needs to be said. My values start kicking in. (Youth, US)

Workers who excel at transformational relationships

Having looked at the experience of youth in transformational relationships, we now describe what we learned about workers who excel in relating to youth. We begin by summarizing worker behaviors – what workers *do* – with reference to the first set of themes set out above.

Transformational relationships...	Workers who excel at these relationships...
Start with youth being heard	Pay attention, listen without judging youth as good or bad, look for the person beyond the case
Involve persistence over time	Are remarkably persistent, don't give up, try again and again to get a relationship started, and stick with it over a long period even when the relationship faces significant challenges
Require workers to be "real"	Reveal themselves to some extent, convey something in common with the youth, understand the world the youth comes from
Involve challenging the youth	Challenge, push and do so in a way that encourages youth to reflect; say and do the difficult things even when youth don't want to hear it
Take advantage of crises	Show up when not expected, stand by youth when they're in trouble and help youth distinguish moments of failure from being a failure

Some of these behaviors reflect personal characteristics that are likely to affect many areas of life, not just what a person does at work. For example, we can distinguish which of our friends and relatives we perceive as particularly persistent, or empathetic, or non-judgmental. Our interviews suggested that there are also some sensibilities, or ways of seeing the world, that are very relevant to the ability to develop transformational relationships with youth.

1.Optimism. One of these – one we likely would not have predicted, had we tried to come up with a list before undertaking this research – is *optimism* in its original sense of focusing on the most hopeful aspects of a situation. These workers believe that almost everyone is capable of change, and that almost everyone is capable of good. Psychologists talk about "fundamental attribution error," the tendency to assume that other people's behavior is driven primarily by their internal characteristics rather than their circumstances. These workers are masters of avoiding fundamental attribution error. Instead, as one person put it, they begin their work with the assumption that youth (even those who have, for example, committed crimes or neglected their children) are "good people in bad situations."

2.Emotional maturity. We use this label to describe an attitude that was memorably expressed in short-hand with the words "it's not about me" and in references to workers being "comfortable in their own skin." These phrases meant, we think, not only that the youth's needs are the focus of the work, but also that the worker can experience even very challenging behavior without taking it personally, and so can model maintaining self-regulation in difficult circumstances.

> It's never about me. That's the other thing. It was just really hard for me, personally, because I'm sensitive. (Worker, US)
>
> You know, to be able to really sort of engage with the people .... You've got to know who you are yourself. It can be a very difficult job ... but if you sitting okay {with yourself} .... I think you bring a lot of who you are to this kind of work. (Worker, UK)

"It's not about me" went beyond responses to specific situations and behaviors, and also described an overall view about the work. These workers routinely see the youth as the person responsible for changing his or her own life. They are hesitant to claim much credit for good results, and their ability to preserve a bit of distance is especially important when a young person's situation gets worse. Sometimes a youth goes away and doesn't come back; people can be lost to drugs, go to prison for a long time, get shot. And the worker has to keep going, with all the other young people he or she is working with, and also with the next ones to come along.

Other attributes we heard about often include: *adaptability*; *flexibility*, the willingness to keep learning and try different things; the *ability to live with ambiguity;* and *curiosity*. Finally, there was frequent mention of the importance of *passion* for the work and *empathy* for youth in difficult circumstances.

We also asked workers how they developed these characteristics. Most of the answers involved life experience of some kind – how they grew up, family relationships, having spent time around people experiencing difficulties. There was near unanimity that *the core attributes described above existed before they began the job*, and were then further developed by training and work experience. For example, one said that being able to talk and listen well seemed a "natural" quality, but it still took work to learn how to apply that ability to work with youth in a way that would help them change. Others spoke of learning from the examples set by fellow workers who do outstanding relational work, for example the value of seeing a colleague go through a difficult period in a relationship without taking it personally.

Finally, we wondered about the effects of age, gender, and race on transformative relationships. Does greater congruence in some of these attributes (the worker being of the same race or gender as an individual youth, or closer in age to the youth) make it easier or harder to form a transformational relationship? The only conclusion we can draw with certainty is that differences can be overcome, as we saw numerous examples of relationships succeeding across these boundaries. We have noted above the importance, in these situations, of workers establishing some common ground with the youth.

Organizations that excel at creating a context in which transformational relationships flourish

The worker behaviors we have described came about not only – we might even argue not primarily – because the people we spoke with were extraordinary individuals. Rather, these workers were practicing within organizational cultures that named, taught, and supported these behaviors. While the organizations we studied differed from one another in many ways, we saw some important similarities that we believe have implications for everyone doing youth work.

1. Relationships are at the heart of practice. Leaders in these organizations understand relationships to be essential to the work. They talk about relationships and build supports for relationships. Developing a relationship with each young person is an explicit goal – sometimes as an end in itself, sometimes because it is seen as the essential precondition to any substantial change in a young person's life.

> Research told us… that healing happens in relationship. (Organization leader, US)

> Everything we do is about relationships. (Organization leader, UK)

As a result, the development of the relationship between a worker and a youth is typically a critical concern of supervision, especially at the beginning. In our prior experience, even with very strong service providers, this initial period is often seen as one in which the worker's key responsibilities are to conduct an assessment and to develop a service plan. Here we saw organizations where the first job is to build a relationship. Sometimes this also means noticing important issues but leaving them unaddressed for a time, because they will be far easier to work on in the context of a strong relationship.

These organizations also expect and plan for difficult periods in relationships. What might be labeled "resistance" elsewhere is understood as a combination of the youth being afraid or lacking confidence and the organization not yet having found the right way to be with them – a spur to greater persistence and additional flexibility, rather than a reason to lose hope. When a youth pulls away from a close relationship with a worker, it's an unsurprising development and a chance to reconnect and push the relationship deeper so the young person can take a necessary risk.

> Because even through all these relapses and all these 'Go to hell. I don't want anything to do with you', we're going to keep showing up, we're going to keep trying to do what we're trying to do, to help you understand that you have other options and choices, and you could have a different view and it could be different, and life could be different. You don't have to go to jail or die. And that's a really powerful thing. (Organization leader, US)

These developments are not easy, and they can still be very challenging for both the worker and the organization, but they are expected parts of the work.

In putting relationships at the heart of practice, these organizations remained clear that *having a relationship with a worker is, rather than an end in itself, an important step towards having a full range of healthy relationships* with family, friends, and neighbors.

> … we can help them repair those relationships that might have been disrupted over time –or build new relationships with new caregivers or the permanent caregivers that they're going to be with. It really requires the workers understanding all of those factors and then the ability for themselves to not become the primary attachment source but to facilitate that between the primary care giver and the youth or the other caregivers in the child's life. (Organization leader, US)

2. Meeting critical needs. These organizations have something to offer youth in addition to the relationship. They are often able to help youth access critical things they haven't been able to find on their own, such as a safe place to live, a chance to return to school, or a job. In addition to the obvious benefits, these supports reduce the sometimes extraordinary stresses youth encounter every day and makes room in their lives for change. They also help build trust for and appreciation of the worker.

> ... I dropped out my freshman year, I ain't about to go back to school. I need a job, she came out of nowhere ... We got a job program in here. Do you want to come? I could say that's when I really hit it off with her. (Youth, US)

> ...the accommodation changed. So it went from sort of chaotic environment to calming... (Worker, UK)

3. A practice model. Especially in the larger organizations we visited in the US, relationship was typically one part of a broader practice model. For example, one organization embeds relationship as one of seven essential elements of practice, such as an understanding of trauma; building self-regulation skills; and helping young people identify their hopes and dreams. Another sees relationships as a part of a model of "unconditional care"; a third has developed a modification of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy that can be used in everyday interactions between workers and youth. Several of the smaller organizations in the UK spoke about having had to increase their clinical knowledge in order to be able to serve many of their clients. We might say that all of these organizations *view relationships as necessary for change, but not sufficient.* In one of our interviews with executive staff, this point was made very strongly:

> ...our original theory was ... we'll surround kids with people that love them, and that would be healing in and of itself and you know what? It wasn't. Because when they left here they met circumstances that were so unbelievably stacked against them that they couldn't possibly hold that relationship into the future inside as an internalized part of them. (Organization leader, US)

As a result, they pay a great deal of attention to the knowledge and skills workers need and the services and supports youth need, in addition to relationships, to help transform their lives.

4. Hiring and supervision. These organizations hire workers whom they believe have the capacity to excel at relating to youth, focusing first on personal qualities and only second, if at all, on applicants' past work experience and related qualifications.

We have described the desired attributes of workers in the last section. Some of the techniques organizations used in the hiring process to try to find these attributes include:

- having candidates meet with several staff members, sometimes in informal settings;
- having youth (current or former program participants) be part of the panel of interviewers;
- getting feedback from everyone a candidate meets (including the receptionist);
- group interviews with multiple candidates, to see how they relate to one another; and
- developing internship programs with local colleges as a pipeline to employment, giving the agency and prospective worker a chance to try one another out over an extended period before making a long-term commitment.

These organizations also *act quickly when a new hire proves problematic.* This was one key area of difference in how organizations relate to staff, compared to how staff are expected to relate to youth, and we heard about it consistently. Despite all of the thought that goes into the hiring process, not every new hire will turn out to be successful. They want to identify problems quickly, attend to minor issues, and then move people out if necessary.

5. Culture. The organizations *make substantial efforts to relate to workers in ways that model how they want workers to relate to youth.* One described a set of "spoken and unspoken rules" that include "speaking kindly and directly to one another"; ensuring that anyone who is being spoken about is in the room (or, when this is impossible, talking about them only as you would if they were present); and expecting everyone to hold each other accountable for these behaviors without regard to organizational hierarchy. Another spoke of avoiding "shaming and blaming" when dealing with problems.

…you can't connect with youth and do good work if you don't feel safe as an employee. (Organization leader, US)

People have to show reflective practice, people have to show their workings out, they have to be prepared to share what they're struggling with, they have to be prepared to talk about what they're finding difficult. We always own everything, so if … a worker's talking about something or someone they've got a problem with, it's always our problem. (Organization leader, UK)

There is considerable emphasis on developing a supportive culture and a "spirit of camaraderie" among staff. In one organization, the pre-service orientation for cohorts of new workers is largely about helping them connect with one another. Another has created high-level mentoring positions for a few staff who were seen as extraordinary at relationships, so they can spend time helping other workers build the same skills.

6. Data. Some of the large organizations in the US have already built the infrastructure needed to routinely use data to track progress and promote improvement, while this remains a goal for others and for many of the smaller UK organizations. That means going beyond measuring contacts with youth, and actually tracking the status of each relationship, and ensuring that supervision uses the data to drive change when things aren't going well.

As an example of how this kind of data can be used, one of the organizations we visited tracks whether there has been conflict between the worker and the youth early on in a relationship. When things are going smoothly, and the relationship is getting stronger, they may use this information to encourage the worker to challenge the youth in order to "stress test" the relationship.

Reflections and Recommendations

We believe that the findings laid out in the last section can lead to policy and practice improvements that will benefit many thousands of young people, and not incidentally make for richer and more rewarding jobs for many workers as well. Here are our reflections on the most important implications of the work we observed, and our recommendations to organizational and system leaders.

1. Putting relationships at the heart of the work. Discussions about youth facing adversity typically incorporate such factors as: the risks they encounter; the needs they present; the strengths they can build upon; and the goals they are pursuing. Relationships matter as much as any of these. We refer both to the importance of relationships with workers that can help young people change, and to the need for youth to build (and re-build) the healthy relationships with family and friends that everyone needs to have a good life. Relationships may be a means to the achievement of familiar outcomes such as completing school or getting and keeping a job. It may also be an end in itself; even when a relationship does not lead to positive change that is as large and as steady as would be ideal, people are much better off with strong relationships to rely upon than without them.

2. Moving beyond strengths-based practice. Many systems, organizations, and workers have integrated the idea of being "strengths-based" into their work. They seek to identify strengths and interests, not just risks and problems, and to create case plans that build on the strengths. This has been an important and positive development; nevertheless, we are struck by how much further the work we observed for this study has gone.

The organizations and workers we met understood *youth as the primary actors in their own change.* In noting this, we do not mean to minimize the many social and economic forces that have contributed to the challenges youth face, all too often including systems that have failed to help. Rather, we make the simple observation that youth are too often treated as passive participants in services, to be fed into programs that will change them. The programs we visited, by contrast, encourage youth to recognize that it is their goals, their actions, and their resilience that will determine the best way for them to overcome adversity and create a better life.

Moreover, the workers we met routinely described youth, even though they might be struggling with multiple, serious problems, as full of positive potential – people who can be assets to society. Youth experienced workers as believing in them – sometimes more than the young people believed in themselves, at least for a time. Organizations consulted youth about what is important to them, reinforcing the message that they are seen, they matter, and they can influence even the most powerful adults in the system. This work points the way for other organizations, even those that have been serious in moving to a strengths-based practice, to go even further in developing practice that is rooted in relationships and that builds agency on the part of young people.

3. Love and boundaries. As noted in the findings section, we were surprised by how often we heard the word "love" in connection with these relationships. When workers and youth used this word, they were talking about strong positive feelings, about caring and feeling cared for. Nevertheless, we took in this information with some anxiety, worrying about the need to observe important legal and ethical boundaries about how adults with authority relate to young people.

This led us to wonder why it should be surprising that workers who are seriously engaged with young people sometimes feel love for them – or, for that matter, are proud of them, or are furious with them, or feel hurt by them. Or that youth have all of these feelings, and more, with regard to the workers. Real relationships almost by definition involve strong feelings, yet our past experience did not lead us to expect to have those feelings named and acknowledged as they were in these interviews.

So many things can work against love, and more broadly against noticing and acknowledging the strong feelings that arise when workers engage intensely with youth. Many workers have learned, somewhere along the way, the idea of maintaining a "professional distance" from the people they work with. Strong feelings are unsettling, and it's understandable that workers might shy away from them in settings that don't expect and acknowledge those feelings, and help workers deal with them. And systems, which tend to treat workers as interchangeable and which create rules to ensure consistent, rules-based responses, do not have much room for the forming of close relationships and love.

But the work we observed indicated that an intensity of commitment can be essential to transformation. For some youth, accustomed to not mattering, understanding that a worker cares deeply about them opens up the possibility of caring more about themselves, acquiring greater agency, and taking the risk of setting and working towards difficult goals. The workers and youth we interviewed were explicit about this, not hesitating to talk about love, in the context of the intense commitment needed for a relationship to be transformational.

4. First, relate. Many of the youth we met had made enormously impressive changes in their lives. Those changes would have been far less likely, we think, had workers begun with fixed goals of the kind we typically see in case plans. Instead, their first step was to relate. Their goal was to connect, to get the young person to see that they matter, to increase the belief that youth could influence their own future. In the short run, workers might also help youth deal with immediate and urgent safety-related questions, and doing so could in turn help to build the relationship. But they let a lot of other things, even important things, wait; one worker in the UK memorably said that "we ignore the cannabis."

Eventually, they'll stop ignoring it, or perhaps the problem will be solved without direct intervention, as the youth changes. This approach requires, we think, a relatively high tolerance for risk, as the youth may still be engaged in dangerous behaviors. It may be particularly challenging for organizations that deal with youth under 18 who are legally in their care or custody, as in child welfare or juvenile justice systems. But it also presents a healthy dose of realism, taking the stance that only the youth can make the risky behaviors stop, and relationship, though indirect, may nevertheless be the shortest path to change.

5. Understanding progress. The last point has important implications for how systems, organizations, supervisors, and workers evaluate progress. Youth have case plans, which have goals (such as completing school), which in turn have objectives (such as regular attendance) that are used as markers of progress towards the goals. We hypothesize that, especially early on in a case, the strength of the developing relationship between worker and youth may be at least as strong a predictor of long-term success as any of these objectives. A given set of circumstances could be evaluated very differently, depending on the progress of the relationship. Accordingly, we recommend that tracking the developing relationship between worker and youth be used by supervisors and organizations as a tool for gauging progress.

6. Equity. This was a qualitative study, not designed in a way that would allow us to draw conclusions about how the experiences of youth might differ by race, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. But we know that there are persistent, substantial inequities in both treatment and outcomes in many systems. If we want to promote strong relationships between workers and all of the youth they try to help, we need to attend to equity. Even when everyone involved has the best of intentions, unconscious bias and racial anxiety can have powerful effects. With regard to relationships, for example, there is a risk that people can be most persistent with those youth they find most appealing, and such judgments may not be conscious ones. Reflective supervision that attends to these risks is an important tool for ensuring equity, as is an organizational culture that explicitly attends to equity and understands it as fundamental to the work.

7. Building relational organizations. Some workers may be so gifted at relationships that they can succeed in developing them even under very challenging circumstances. Far more will be successful at developing important relationships with youth if they are working within organizations that actively promote relationships. Our research suggests that they do so in two ways, via a practice model and a set of organizational supports for the desired practice.

We understood the practice models we saw in numerous agencies, though they varied from one another in detail, to have in common practice centered on relationships, but recognizing the need for additional components. The common elements of these practice models appear to us to include the following.

- Focusing the early period of work on building an authentic relationship; getting to know the person, not just the case;
- Emphasizing relentlessness, consistency, and availability; showing up both in crises and to note and celebrate achievements, even small ones;
- Workers strategically sharing information about themselves in order to advance the relationship;
- Expecting that relapse and failure are likely to occur, and viewing these difficult periods as times that can be used to strengthen the relationship and to support the young person's growth;
- Challenging problematic behaviors and ways of thinking;
- Using the relationship with the worker as a bridge to healthy life-long relationships with family and friends;
- Making strategic decisions about the most important issue(s) to focus on at any time, given the youth's goals and interests on one hand and any critical safety-related issues on the other; letting some challenges go, even if those challenges will ultimately have to be addressed; and
- Incorporating into the model elements that help youth understand their own motivations, thoughts, and feelings and build the belief that they can influence their own future.

The *organizational supports needed for the practice model to work* include elements such as:

- Opportunities for workers to learn about adolescent and youth development, the effects of adversity and trauma on development, etc;
- Access to the practical supports young people need, such as education, jobs, and housing, along with the ability to advocate for and with youth as they deal with systems like juvenile and criminal justice;
- Practices that reinforce "mattering," for example involvement of youth in reviewing organizational policies;
- Sufficient time for workers to build and maintain relationships, and sufficient flexibility to go about this differently with different young people;
- Hiring practices focused on identifying people whose values are consistent with the practice model and who have strong relational skills;
- Supervisory and professional development practices focused on building these skills, including supervisors who can model and demonstrate them;
- Support for staff in caring for themselves and dealing with the stress inherent in working with youth who have experienced significant adversity; and
- Gathering data about relationships (for example, tracking the development of relationships between workers and youth; tracking and assessing the health of the youth's social network; perhaps incorporating youth self-assessments of both relationships and of their overall progress), along with a process for using the data to learn and improve.

8. Building relational systems. Just as workers do their jobs within the context of an organization, organizations have to function within the context of the large public systems such as child welfare and juvenile justice that provide their funding, determine the outcomes they are expected to achieve, and regulate their activities. Youth-serving systems are, in our experience, rarely attuned to relationships and some of their policies create obstacles to relationship. An obvious example is the extensive documentation requirements

that can take up so much of a worker's time, and that can lead them to spend the time they do have with young people in a pattern of questions and answers that produces the information needed to fill out forms but does little to advance relationships.

The following actions by systems and their leaders can help promote relationships.

- Leaders talking about the importance of relationships and modeling attention to relationships;
- Leaders driving conversations, grounded in research, about what changes (in behavior, thinking, and feeling) the system wants to promote in the people it is trying to help, and what it will take to bring about those changes. It's hard to answer these questions without attending seriously to relationships;
- Providing staff at all levels with professional development opportunities focused on the specific behaviors that promote relationships;
- Encouraging supervisory practices that model relationship-building, monitor the progress of relationships with youth, and attend to the meaning and tone of activities rather than just whether they happened;
- Incorporating discussion of relationships into the formal processes the system uses to track progress (e.g. case conferences);
- Reviewing the system's documentation requirements, with the goal of eliminating some and changing those requirements that promote behavior that makes it harder to build relationships (e.g. situations in which a worker has to ask for a great deal of personal information very early on in order to be able to fill out a required form);
- Asking workers, and organizational leaders, what they could stop doing with little or no harm to youth, in order to make more time available for relationships;
- Asking youth about what has helped them build relationships, disseminating this information, and promoting conversations about how to use it;
- Asking providers who are already attending to relationships about what system changes would have helped them get where they are more quickly or more effectively.

Finally, we think it would be useful for system leaders to select a population group with which they do not feel they are currently succeeding and to try out new approaches to practice, built around relationships, with that population. For example, many child welfare systems struggle to engage and work with the parents of children in foster care – parents who are often themselves young adults facing all of the challenges of the youth described in this study. An approach to these young parents that begins with relationship – with listening, spending time, being "real," challenging when necessary, using crises to make progress – would look very different from most current practice. Systems might explore what they could do to encourage such an approach to see if it would lead to more productive results.

9. Better understanding relationships involving teens and young adults. Most of the existing research literature on responsive relationships that promote healthy development is about the bond between parents or other caregivers and very young children. This paper has looked at a different kind of relationship (with workers, rather than primary caregivers) for a different age group (adolescents and young adults). Further research could help us better understand how sensitivity works in this context. And today's widespread efforts to identify programs with positive effects could usefully be supplemented by far more attention to what happens inside programs, in the interactions between workers and youth that lead to improvements in health and well-being.

Appendix: Methodology

1. Ethics

The ethical approval of the study of transformational relationships for youth who face severe and multiple disadvantage has been granted from both a U.K. committee, the Ethics Committee of the Centre for Social Policy that sits within Dartington Social Research Unit, and in the United States by an Institutional Review Board housed at Metis, Inc.

2. Sample

In keeping with the aim of the study, participant recruitment followed a purposive non-random selection of voluntary or non-profit organizations who supported people who faced multiple and severe disadvantage and whose work had a relational focus (they explicitly acknowledged the primacy of the role of relationships for the people they supported). Organizations were selected from Dartington and CSSP's networks. Leaders were contacted and the aims of the study and the proposed methodology were explained to them.

Within these organizations, three sets of participants were interviewed: youth; professional helpers who were employed to support the youth; and representatives of the leadership of those organizations. Leaders of each organization were asked to identify the workers and youth eligible for the study. For youth, they were asked to nominate those who were aged between 16 and 25 for whom all of the following applied: (1) had experienced extreme difficulty (encompassing a history including abuse or neglect; poverty; and/or other significant risks, coupled with challenging behaviors such as crime or misuse of substances); (2) had been supported by the organization for at least six months; (3) had made a positive change relative to their situation when they first got involved with the organization; and (4) had formed a significant positive relationship with a worker in the organization.

With respect to workers, leaders were asked to name workers for whom all of the following applied: (1) their job role was to support young people; (2) could be an employee (e.g. therapist, counselor, youth worker) or a volunteer; (3) considered by leadership and peers to be exemplary at their job; and (4) repeatedly identified by youth as someone with whom they formed a positive relationship or by staff and leaders of the organization as someone who was particularly good at relating to youth.

Youth who participated in the study were provided with a $50 gift card in the US and £20 gift voucher in the UK.

3. Sample characteristics[2]

	Leaders	Youth	Helpers/workers	Total
UK	11*	13***	19	43
US	5**	17	16	38
Total	16	30	35	81

*   Due to scheduling difficulties, one UK leader did not participate in the study. Two leaders were interviewed from one UK organization

**   In the US, leaders were interviewed as a group in each organization, so a larger number of people participated. Due to resource constraints, interviews with youth and workers were conducted in four of the five US organizations.

*** Youth sample reflects the differences between UK and US organizations, with UK ones supporting people across all ages, while US mainly youth. Therefore, while in the US each organization had identified prospective youth for the study, four of the UK ones were not supporting youth who fitted the criteria at the time of the study. Nonetheless, as workers of these organizations were suitable for the research, they were included in the study.

4. Data collection

4.1. Instruments
A series of themes drawn from a literature review on relationships and Dartington and CSSP's previous work have informed the development of the interviewing questions. Three interviewing protocols, one for each type of participant, were developed and revised after consultation with the ethics committee (UK) and Institutional Review Board (US).

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[2]As changes during the pre-test reflected order rather than content, we included in the thematic analysis the pilot organizations, one in the US (youth=2; workers=1) and one in the UK (leader=1, worker=1, youth=2), so the total numbers reflect that.

The youth protocol focused on understanding the relationship formed with one of the supporting workers and its role in helping the youth make positive changes in their lives. The themes explored in the interviewing questions referred to the: (1) development of the relationship, including key positive and difficult moments, (2) attributes of the worker, (3) changes made during the support period, (4) reasons attributed to the change, (5) youth self-perception.

The worker protocol focused on understanding how workers build relationships with youth, specifically by asking them to recount one positive relationship with a young person and more broadly, by exploring a series of themes in the interviewing questions. The themes referred to: (1) qualities that enable them to relate to others, (2) development of such qualities, (3) benefits perceived from the relationships they form with youth, (4) emotions felt in relationships, (5) situations when youth improved despite not building a good relationship and vice versa, (6) the role of the employer organizations in enabling worker to build relationships and the way in which it may impede this, (7) role of shame in the population they support.

The themes explored in the leadership protocol referred to: (1) the centrality of relationships within the organization, (2) the importance of relationships to changing the lives of those in contact with the organization, (3) the workers who excel at relating to others, their attributes and the role of training in developing them, (4) the way in which the organization supports building client-worker relationships (hire, train, supervise and hold accountable staff), (5) questions related to relational work they would like to be answered through this study.

Pilot visits were undertaken, one by each team, to assess the feasibility of the instruments. Minor changes related to the order of questions, rather than content, were identified and the instruments were amended accordingly.

4.2. Consent
At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked for their consent to be part of the study and for permission to digitally record the interviews. The consent forms were tailored (separately) to youth and to workers, and for youth under 18, an assent procedure for the youth and a consent process for a parent or guardian were made available. The consent procedure covered the aim of the study, confidentiality, its voluntary nature, length, data use, and the incentive. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by a third-party in compliance with Data Protection policies.
(One participant did not consent to recording the interview so the research team took notes instead).

4.3. Anonymization
All information that could identify a participant was anonymized in the study. A study code was formulated to protect the participants' identity. This included: (a) a site letter, (b) a 3-digit participant number, and (c) the country abbreviation. The remaining information that could identify participants (e.g. names of streets, institutions, people) was also replaced by approximate information related to the original content but not identifiable.

5. Analysis of data

5.1. Approach
Data analysis was conducted using the software program Nvivo11. The material was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, both by working deductively with a list of pre-defined themes identified from the research literature, previous research of both organizations, and team discussions as well as working inductively allowing new themes to emerge.

5.2. Analysis process
Transcripts were given attributes based on the type of participant (youth, worker, leader), gender (male, female), and location of organization (US, UK). A coding framework was developed to guide the analysis of the material. This contained a list of 19 main codes, which are categories used to capture or summarize raw data. Coding was performed line by line, applying the deductive codes where appropriate and coding inductively when content was judged important but did not fit within the existing framework. Each code had a clear description to ease the analysis and prevent confusion when coding.

6. Quality control

The research team used Lincoln and Guba's[3] criteria for ensuring trustworthiness of the qualitative data. These fall under four categories: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility, which is the level of confidence in the 'truth' of the findings, is achieved through a series of techniques, for example by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and others. In this study, prolonged engagement coupled with persistent observation, triangulation, and peer debriefing were used to ensure credibility of the findings. For example, the researchers conducting the interviews knew the study organizations, the context in which they operated, and people they served. They spent adequate amount of time observing the setting and spoke with a range of people who were part of those organizations. In terms of triangulation, it can be argued that interviewing three sets of different participants on two continents provided sufficient means to compare different data sources using the same method. Peer debriefing was a constant feature of the study, as team members interchanged their responsibilities, with some conducting interviews and others being available for debrief, and vice versa.

Transferability, which is the extent to which finding can be generalized in other contexts, is achieved through a "thick" description of the study, including sample, data collection, analysis. This Appendix, alongside the materials used to interview participants, is set out to make the study as transparent as possible.

Dependability and confirmability, relate to the degree to which the findings are consistent if repeated and, including managing the bias in the research. The researcher coding the data kept a reflexivity journal in which ideas, decisions, and hypotheses pertinent to study were recorded throughout the analysis. The study also involved multiple investigators, which led to a series of conversations where bias of one researcher could be diminished.

7. Limitations

The limitations of our study include selection of sample, logistical difficulties, and conducting the work on two different continents. In terms of selection of sample, participants were selected purposefully for this research and not randomly. Having said this, this study set out to understand how transformational relationships are built, how they might be involved in youth's change, and the attributes of workers who are able to build relationships and of organizations who enable relational work, rather than to test differences between such workers and organizations and others doing similar work.

We mainly relied on the leaders' subjective assessment to select workers and youth whom they thought were suitable for the study. The definitions of extreme difficulty was understood and used in various ways in the field, so while we set the defining parameters in the selection criteria, we cannot guarantee the match between the criteria and samples of youth and workers. In fact, we expect substantial variation in these two groups. Definition of progress in youth as well as the concept of positive relationships are two additional sources of heterogeneity within study groups.

We faced logistical difficulties when conducting the study visits and interviews. For example, if a worker turned out to be unavailable on the day of our site visit because of a crisis, the organization would substitute another worker, and the same thing sometimes happened with youth.

We did not gather information about the race, gender, or other salient characteristics of the youth and workers interviewed, nor did we ask whether these factors matched between worker and youth engaged in a transformational relationship.

Lastly, in as much as we see the advantages of conducting a study on two different continents, this brought nonetheless some challenges. One of them relates to the nature of the organizations involved in the study. With some exceptions, the UK organizations were small in size, while all of the US organizations were large, sometimes with hundreds of staff. Another difference between organizations concerned the population served, with UK ones covering all ages, while US agencies focused primarily on youth. This meant that while we had workers from all organizations involved in the study, there were some organizations in the UK at which there were no youth meeting the study criteria available for interview at the time of the study. However, the study did not intend to determine how one particular organization built positive relationships with youth, but to examine themes consistent with interviews across organizations. In this sense, the sample size we achieved for the three different study groups enabled the research team to achieve this.

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[3]Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. Naturalistic inquiry, 289, 331.