



australian **YOUTH**  
**MENTORING**  
**NETWORK**

## Research Summary June 2015

Attitudes and beliefs of older youth in foster care



**It's good to know that you got somebody that's not going anywhere: Attitudes and beliefs of older youth in foster care about child welfare-based natural mentoring**

Johanna K.P. Greeson, Allison E. Thompson, Samira Ali, and Rebecca Stern Wenger. "It's good to know that you got somebody that's not going anywhere: Attitudes and beliefs of older youth in foster care about child welfare-based natural mentoring" *Children and Youth Services Review* 48 (2015): 140-149.

**Introduction:** Young adults who have aged out of foster care are more likely to have poorer mental health, and higher rates of delinquency, unplanned parenthood, unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and criminal justice involvement. However, the relatively new concept of natural mentoring, mentoring relationships with adults, who are not the youth's caregiver, and are not part of a formal mentoring program, have been shown to have positive effects. This study investigated the attitudes and beliefs of older adolescents in foster care toward the implementation of a natural mentoring intervention designed to promote enduring relationships between youth at risk and caring, supportive non-parent adults from within the youth's existing social network.

**Methodology:** Six focus groups were conducted with 17 older youth in foster care attending a specialised

high school for young people in out-of-home care in a large, urban city. Focus group data were transcribed, analysed and grouped in themes by a team of researchers.

**Results:** There was wide consensus among the youth that permanent relationships with caring adults were valuable and desirable. Because the youth participants resided in out-of-home care, they had experienced relationship disruptions in the form of familial loss. Many youth discussed the desire for permanent relationships with adults characterised by love, affection, and safety, themes which are corroborated in the scientific literature. The following significant themes emerged related to natural mentoring for older foster youth aging out from foster care:

1. Need for permanent relationships with caring adults,
2. Youth conceptions of natural mentoring,
3. Unique challenges related to natural mentoring for youth in

- foster care,
4. Role of a natural mentoring intervention in child welfare,
  5. Challenges for implementing a child welfare-based natural mentoring intervention.

the existence of organically formed relationships, however such relationships may not be readily recognisable to youth in care or may require some amount of support in terms of mending and healing. The

Although the majority of youth in the focus groups discussed the benefit of natural mentoring relationships in their lives, some youth discussed its challenges as well. The concept of natural mentoring relies on the existence of supportive relationships within a youth's social network, but for some youth in foster care, these sorts of relationships are sparse. Given their history in foster care and a socially constructed depiction of being "deviant," some youth felt insecure about others' perceptions of them.

authors state that although for this population, initiation and maintenance of a natural mentoring relationship is desired, further research is need to determine the level of support required in making and maintain such a match In addition, the authors conclude that relationships with non-parental adults may provide these youth with an added resource in order to foster positive development, particularly around emotionally vulnerable transition periods, and therefore natural mentoring for young people ageing out of foster care is worth exploring further in terms of challenges, opportunities, and outcomes.

**Implications:** The outcomes and subsequent challenges above speak to the vital role a natural mentoring intervention could play in the lives of youth in foster care. Although the notion of natural mentoring implies