Wraparound School Supports: Exploring Students' Experiences of Meaningful Relationships with Caring Adults

by

Jessica Schultz

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in

Psychological Studies in Education

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta

© Jessica Schultz, 2022

Abstract

Relationships are not only important to healthy youth development but may be the key ingredient which make intervention programs with youth successful. This study used data from evaluation of a wraparound school initiative called All in For Youth which has, among others, an aim of building and maintaining meaningful relationships between students and caring adults. This study explored students' experiences of how caring adults built positive relationships with them. Results showed three themes that illustrate how adults built these relationships. The first theme reveals that adults build relationships through their interactions with youth. Three subthemes highlight interactions that provide support, promote growth, and involve a social component. The second theme identifies caring skills adults demonstrated that nurtured close relationships. The three associated subthemes show adults were dependable, encouraging, and emotionally intelligent. The third theme discusses how adults build relationships through fostering supportive environments. Three subthemes describe that adults enabled connections, created safe spaces, and utilized team communication. In addition to the three core themes that illustrate how adults build relationships, a fourth theme discussed the evolving nature of student-adult relationships, where it was found that some relationships progressed after students' high school graduation. This study aligns with current research on developmental relationships and highlights the potential that wraparound school support initiatives, like the AIFY program, have for continuing research on these important relationships between youth and non-family adults.

Keywords: wraparound supports, developmental relationships, high school, students, caring adults

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jessica Schultz. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board project name “Enhancing Child and Youth Resilience Through School-Based, Wraparound Supports”, Pro00101318 August 30, 2020.

Dedication

Dedicated to MCB.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Lake Manitoba First Nation for their support in making the completion of this degree possible.

I would like to acknowledge the funding support of the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute for the completion of my degree program.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review 3

The Wraparound Approach 3

History 3

Theoretical Underpinnings 4

Principles of Wraparound 5

Phases of Wraparound 7

Theory of Change 8

Implementing the Wraparound Approach in Education 8

Developmental Relationships 9

Adolescent Relationships: Shifting from Identifying Benefits to Exploring Nature and Process 9

Calls to Systematically Study Developmental Relationships 11

The Developmental Relationships Framework 13

Exploring Developmental Relationships in Applied Settings 15

The All in For Youth Initiative 17

Mission and Theory of Change 17

AIFY Students and Families 18

AIFY Model of Support 18

Expected Outcomes and Evaluation of Impacts 19

Purpose of the Study 21

Similarities and Differences Between Evaluation and Research 21

Utilizing AIFY Evaluation Data 23

Chapter 3: Methods 24

Positionality Statement 24

Research Question 26

Participants 26

Data Collection 26

Data Analysis 26

Chapter 4: Results 30

Variety of Interactions 30

Give Me Support 30

Help Me with My Schoolwork. 30
Listen and Help Me Cope. 31
Help Me Outside of School. 32
Help me Grow 33
Give me a Specific Task 33
Inspire Me. 34
We Don't Always Have to be Serious 35
Multifaceted Interactions 36
Caring Skills 36
I Can Depend on You 36
You Encourage Me 37
You Always Know What I Need 38
Fostering Supportive Environments 39
Work as a United Team 40
Help Me Make Friends 40
Give Me Somewhere I Feel Safe 42
Enduring Relationships 42
Chapter 5: Discussion 44
Implications for Policy and Practice 47
Limitations 51
Future Directions 52
References 54
Appendix A 59
Appendix B 68

List of Figures

Figure 1: Developmental Relationships Framework 15
Figure 2: The AIFY Model 19

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recognition of the adverse impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had on children's and adolescents' development and wellbeing, Children's Services (2021) released a report listing recommendations for the Government of Alberta to meet in order to combat the ill effects of the lockdown and promote children and adolescents' wellbeing. Their first recommendation was to create new and support existing interventions that are targeted at helping children and youth recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic. Their fourth recommendation asked the government to, "Recognize and enhance the essential role of schools in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students" (Children's Services, 2021, p. 2). Although not focused on recovery from the pandemic, this study does examine an already existing wraparound school program in Edmonton, Alberta, called the All in for Youth (AIFY) initiative (United Way, n.d.-a).

The AIFY initiative is "a school-based, wraparound model of social support service delivery for children, youth, and families who are experiencing vulnerability in their school communities. The overall objective of AIFY is to support the overall wellbeing of students and their families, so students can achieve success in their schooling and families can thrive." (Community University Partnership, n.d.). Specifically, this study seeks to understand students' experiences of supportive relationships with adults within an AIFY school. An academic study such as this one that explores supportive relationships within Albertan schools is timely given that the panel of experts overseeing the *Child and Youth Well-Being Review* repeatedly acknowledge the important role that such relationships play in promoting healthy development in youth (Children's Services, 2021). While the review focuses on youth's relationships with their peers and family members, this study explores youth relationships with non-family adults within

their school. As it will be shown, youth's relationships with these adults are different from their relationships with peers and kin-adults but are equally if not more important as young people age (Beam et al., 2002; Scales et al., 2006; Sethi & Scales, 2020; Scales et al., 2020).

While the data analysed for this study was collected during the pandemic in the summer of 2021, the students interviewed had graduated from the wraparound school before the start of the pandemic. However, their experiences can provide valuable insight into the importance of relationships within a unique school context. Given the current calls for the Government of Alberta to prioritize intervention programs, and recommendations to recognize wraparound school services, this is a timely study to provide guidance on how to achieve the recommendations set out by Children's Services (2021).

This study will begin with a literature review in Chapter two that will introduce the wraparound approach, provide background of the research on developmental relationships, and provide details on the AIFY initiative. Chapter three will cover the methods used in this study. Chapter four will provide a detailed account of the results in terms of students' experiences of how adults built positive relationships with them. Chapter five will situate the results of this study within the broader literature on developmental relationships. It will also speak to the implications of this study, as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research. Chapter six will provide a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Wraparound Approach

History

Friedman (1994) identifies that categorical service delivery was originally designed and implemented before the 1960's, when nuclear families and communities were stable and in general, family needs were met within the family unit and wider community. When needs did arise, they were often singular and thus best served by a single service. It was within this historical context that categorical service delivery emerged (Friedman, 1994). Each service specialized in addressing a specific, singular need using a deficit-based lens and provided isolated support (Malysiak, 1997; VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996). Where families whose needs were not aligned with the specific mandates of categorical services were referred out to other categorical services, it was possible, for example with children labelled as being "severely emotionally disturbed," for children to be removed from their family home and community and placed into residential treatment facilities (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996; Duchnowski & Friedman, 1990).

By the mid-1990's, Friedman (1994) reported that social systems were unexpectedly overwhelmed with need. While the social structures pre-1960's were assumed to have indefinitely continued, they had started to slowly decline and by the 1990's families and children's health were both destabilized, and once safe, community-oriented neighbourhoods had become dangerous and were no longer nurturing (Friedman, 1994). This became problematic for categorical services which failed to address the reality that individuals and families often experience multiple, intersecting needs, and resulted in families with multiple needs being referred to multiple services (Friedman, 1994; VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996). The wraparound

approach to service delivery emerged as an alternate method to address the increasingly complex needs of children and families which were not being met using the traditional categorical service delivery method, and as an intervention to prevent the removal of children from their community and family (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996).

Although elements of the wraparound approach were used in the 1960's in Canada, and before then in Europe, the term 'wraparound' itself wasn't coined until the early 1980's (VanDenBerg et al., 2008). In general, wraparound involves individualizing service supports to meet childrens' and families' unique needs (Malysiak, 1997). VanDenBerg et al. (2008) describe wraparound as a process that "is a collaborative, team-based approach to service and support planning. Through the wraparound process, teams create plans to meet the needs—and improve the lives—of children and youth with complex needs and their families" (VanDenBerg et al., 2008, p.1).

By using a wraparound approach, a single service agency can deliver comprehensive support to address multiple needs without referring clients to outside services (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996). Additionally, wraparound service is inherently flexible and adaptable to meet the changing needs of clients (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996) and thus "has become common shorthand for flexibility and comprehensiveness of service delivery, as well as for approaches that are intended to help keep children and youth in the community" (VanDenBerg et al., 2008, p. 2). Whereas categorical service delivery is deficit-based and isolated, wraparound service delivery is strengths based, collaborative, and integrated (Malysiak, 1997).

Theoretical Underpinnings

Malysiak (1997) argues that, while both wraparound and categorical models purport to be family-centered, the concept of 'family-centered' is grounded in different theoretical

perspectives within each model. Malysiak (1997) identifies that services offered through categorical models are aligned with positivist perspectives and as such are deficit-based and traditionally involve professionals in expert roles who are skilled in assessing, diagnosing, and treating families. Alternatively, wraparound models are rooted within constructivist, critical, and ecological thought, where a family's strengths are identified, and family members are equal partners in decision-making who work collaboratively with professionals to develop a plan that utilizes family and community strengths to meet the family's unique needs (Malysiak, 1997). In this way, the wraparound collaborative model is theoretically different from categorical expert-based models and parallels a larger shift within Western thought from positivism to constructivism (Malysiak, 1997).

A later exploration by Malysiak (1998) identified five levels of family-centered practice, whereby a family's role differed among expert- and collaborative models of care. Within expert models of care, a family's role is to provide information to the experts and to subsequently receive the service deemed appropriate (Malysiak, 1998). Families have limited, if any, active involvement with their treatment plan (Malysiak, 1998). Conversely, within collaborative models of care, families not only provide information to the members of their treatment team and are the recipients of service, but they are actively engaged in the development of their treatment plan and participate in all decision-making processes (Malysiak, 1998). In this way, family-centered practices within expert- and collaborative models of care differ in terms of how decisions are made, who's perspective is prioritized, and the degree to which a family's strengths are utilized (Malysiak, 1998). As such, Malysiak (1998) ultimately established that wraparound models are grounded in constructivism and ecological systems theory.

Principles

While VanDenBerg and Grealish (1996) identified the early elements of the wraparound process, it wasn't until 1998 that ten guiding principles of wraparound were formally established (VanDenBerg et al., 2008). As reported by Bruns et al. (2008), the ten principles are:

1. Family voice and choice. The wraparound team actively seeks out and prioritizes the family and youth's perspectives. The family and youth are the ultimate decision makers, which helps maximize outcomes.
2. Team based. The family and youth have choice in deciding who is on their team. Team members are committed to working with the family and improving their wellbeing.
3. Natural supports. The team utilizes informal (non-professional) supports that are already present in the family and/or youths' lives who become team members.
4. Collaboration. Team members work together to achieve shared goals.
5. Community based. Teams work from neutral, safe settings that promote the family's inclusion in their community.
6. Culturally competent. Teams respect and embrace the culture and identity of the youth, their family, and their community.
7. Individualized. Supports and services offered to the youth and family have been tailored to meet their unique needs.
8. Strengths based. Services and supports will utilize and build upon the youth's, family's, community's, and team's strengths.
9. Unconditional. Support is provided regardless of the setbacks that have occurred, until a time when the team agrees wraparound is no longer needed.
10. Outcome based. Outcomes are measurable and are used to monitor progress and inform the team's decisions about the specific support plan.

Although these principles were derived from the use of wraparound processes in the United States, these ten principles hold, with minor additions, for the use of wraparound approaches within Canada (Debicki, 2009).

Phases

There are four key phases of any wraparound approach, beginning with preparing and meeting the team (Walker et al., 2008). The goals of this phase are to introduce youth and their family to the wraparound process; to stabilize any crises they are facing; to begin conversations between the youth, their family and other team members; and finally, to begin arranging future meetings. During this phase, trust begins building and a shared vision is created amongst the team, which ultimately allows family members to see themselves as key members of the team whose perspectives take priority. The next phase involves adhering to the principles of wraparound to develop the initial plan of care as well as crisis and safety plans. Trust continues to be built during this phase as the youth and family take an active role in the development of the care plan. The third phase involves implementing the plan and regularly measuring outcomes, which is important because this feedback is used to revise and update the plan as necessary. It is also during this phase that successes are celebrated, which serve to maintain focus on the teams' strengths and to motivate members until their vision is achieved. At that point, the team moves to the final phase, which involves formally planning and implementing a transition out of the wraparound program. A culturally relevant celebration is planned to celebrate the youth, family, and team's accomplishments. Afterwards, periodical check-ins are conducted with the youth and their family during which additional support is offered to the family as required (Walker et al., 2008). It is important to note that the wraparound process is not conducted in a linear fashion,

with clear definition between phases. Due to the iterative and flexible nature of the process, it is possible that elements of each of the phases can occur simultaneously (Walker et al., 2008).

Theory of Change

Similar to the iterative, non-linear phases of wraparound, how change is produced will also vary between youths and families, even when accessing the same wraparound program (Walker, 2008). This is due in part to the individualized plan that is tailored to each youth and family, meaning no two plans will ever be alike. However, as Walker (2008) notes, effective teams who are conscious of, and abide by, the ten principles of wraparound are likely to produce change in one of two ways. First, youth and their family can experience change as a direct result of the effectiveness of the supports and services that they accessed (Walker, 2008). When supports and services are personalized to a family's unique needs, they will be more effective than supports offered by traditional categorical services because they are seen by the family as increasingly relevant and feasible (Walker, 2008). Additionally, since families have the ultimate choice in what resources are needed and accessed, their investment in, and commitment to accessing and utilizing those services and supports are increased (Walker, 2008). Secondly, Walker (2008) notes that change can occur internally in youths and their families as a direct result of their involvement in a wraparound team and their experience in the wraparound process. This is especially true as teams start meeting short- and mid-term goals and revising their plan as necessary in order to achieve long-term goals (Walker, 2008).

Implementing the Wraparound Approach in Education

One environment that is well suited to a wraparound approach are elementary and high schools. In fact, Hill (2020) identifies that within American schools, there is a clear need for wraparound models of support to be implemented in order to bolster students' academic

achievement as well as to support and improve their social and emotional development. Hill (2020) continues by stating that these tasks are currently taken on by teachers, even though they are generally not trained to meet the complex needs of 'at-risk' students. Implementing a wraparound approach can allow teachers to utilize their strengths and work collaboratively on a team that has the shared goal of meeting the wholistic needs of students (Hill, 2020). Providing students with multiple supportive adults with whom they can build strong relationships may be especially beneficial as growing research has identified the pivotal role that developmental relationships play in adolescent development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). As I will discuss in the next section, these relationships may be the key to any successful intervention method.

Developmental Relationships

Adolescent Relationships: Shifting from Identifying Benefits to Exploring Nature and Process

The systematic study of relationships within adulthood has been a formal area of research interest since the late 1960's and early 1970's (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). After reaching a consensus that strong relationships in adulthood were intrinsically linked to happiness and wellbeing, relationship scholars began shifting their focus of study from identifying the benefits of relationships, to understanding the process of how these relationships formed (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). I observe that a similar shift may have taken place regarding research on relationships in adolescence. Once the links between healthy relationships and improvement of youth's well-being were established (often conceptualized as connectedness; see Resnick et al., 1993; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Barber & Schulterman, 2008; Sieving et al., 2017), some scholars began to shift their study of adolescent relationships to focus on understanding the process of how these relationships function.

Beam et al (2002) note that historically, the study of relationships within adolescents' lives was dominated by research examining youths' relationships with their parents or their peers. Comparatively fewer studies were conducted examining adolescents' relationships with other adults in their lives (including mentors, other family members, or nonfamily adults in the community). Sometimes called "very important non-parental adults" (VIP), these adults were defined as "someone at least 21 years old who has had a significant influence on the adolescent or whom the adolescent could count on in times of need and who engaged in good 'role-model' behaviour" (Beam et al., 2002, p. 306). In seeking to understand the defining aspects of adolescent-VIP relationships, Beam et al. (2002) found that these relationships are a natural part of development and that VIPs are important to adolescents because they show adolescents respect, they provide emotional support and support the adolescent's activities, and they act as someone whom adolescents can talk to. Additionally, these relationships are qualitatively different than adolescents' relationships with their parents or peers, although they contain both parent and peer like elements. Beam et al. (2002) also found that kin- and non-kin VIP relationships differed, where adolescents had more contact with non-kin VIP, but in comparison kin-VIP relationships were mutually valued more and experienced more conflict. Lastly, Beam et al. (2002) concluded that a hierarchy existed within VIP relationships, with more significant VIP relationships exhibiting more types of support and more perceived importance but were achieved through less frequent contact. Overall, not only are adolescent-VIP relationships important to youth in multiple ways but Beam et al., (2002) conclude they are not being utilized to their full potential to bolster youth development. Acknowledging the value of VIP relationships but noting the difference between kin- and non-kin VIPs, Scales et al. (2006) conducted further studies with a focus on these non-kin, or non-family, adults.

Continuing this shift away from the identification of relationship benefits, Scales et al. (2006) explored how engagement with non-family adults in the community worked to support youth development. They found that overall, adolescents who engage in their communities are more likely to meet and form relationships with non-family adults, which are strongly connected to long-term thriving and, to a lesser extent, decreased risk behaviour. Additionally, and consistent with Beam et al. (2002), it was found that youths' relationships and interactions with non-family adults in their communities were unique in what they offered adolescents and did not mimic adolescents' relationships with parents or peers (Scales et al., 2006). Regardless of the label used to identify adolescent relationships with non-family adults in their lives, research studies like those discussed above have begun showing that not only are these relationships a normal part of development but they, in addition to adolescents' relationships with all adults (whether parents, relatives, or other non-parental adults), may play a key role in human development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). This has led to calls for evaluations of relationship-based interventions to be based in part upon whether interventions improve adolescents' developmental relationships with adults.

Calls to Systematically Study Developmental Relationships

Coining the term 'developmental relationships,' Li and Julian (2012) argue that these relationships are central to human development and are the "active ingredient" to any successful intervention program. They contend that human development is maximized in the presence of developmental relationships and subsequently, in the absence of such relationships, human development becomes compromised (Li & Julian, 2012). According to Li and Julian (2012), developmental relationships are a style of relationship that encompasses four components: attachment, reciprocity, progressive complexity, and a balance of power. They define attachment

as, “any emotional connection that is natural, positive, and appropriate for the context” (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 158). Li and Julian (2012) elaborate that reciprocity is expressed through the adult’s use of scaffolding and fading in a manner that is reciprocal to a child’s developmental level which leads to increasingly complex activities that eventually lead the child to become autonomous. Thus, a balance of power between the child and the adult is achieved (Li and Julian, 2012). Borrowing and renaming Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) definition of optimal dyad interactions, developmental relationships are those in which:

> Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person
>
> (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 60; as cited in Li & Julian, 2012, p.158).

Li and Julian (2012) present three case studies in which improving developmental relationships resulted in improved developmental outcomes for children. What is more, these case studies occurred across diverse intervention settings, including a Russian orphanage, within elementary classrooms in the United States and Japan, and finally within a mentoring program in the United States. In addition to defining developmental relationships and providing the groundwork for its empirical study, Li and Julian (2012) call for future research aimed at developing credible methods to assess developmental relationships.

Answering this call, the Search Institute (2013) announced a new agenda with a priority on developmental relationships. This agenda presented three commitments. First, to continue to expand their prior research on developmental assets to identify “gateway assets” that lead youth to increasing their number of assets. Secondly, they committed to studying and strengthening

developmental relationships through four key focus areas. These included developing a theoretical understanding of developmental relationships, identifying malleable factors of successful developmental relationships, developing accurate measures of developmental relationships, and ultimately implementing this knowledge within schools and community organizations in order to begin supporting the growth of developmental relationships between caring adults and youth. Their final commitment emerged from the understanding that to create long-term change for youth, they must also improve families and communities. As such, the Search Institute committed to creating "developmental communities" (Search Institute, 2013). Since the announcement of their new agenda, the Search Institute has become a leader when it comes to the emerging science of developmental relationships and is responsible for the development of the Developmental Relationships Framework.

The Developmental Relationships Framework

With its release in 2015, the Search Institute report entitled *Don't Forget the Families* (Pekel et al., 2015) was foundational to understanding the emerging science on developmental relationships. While the initial definition of developmental relationships was borrowed (Li & Julian, 2012) it has since been defined as "close connections through which young people develop the character strengths to discover who they are, gain the ability to shape their own lives, and learn how to interact with and contribute to others" (Pekel et al., 2015, p. 12). Along with this definition came the working draft of the Developmental Relationships Framework, which has since been revised to better reflect the growing literature. Developed using focus group research, existing data, and reviewing multidisciplinary research on youth development, this framework describes five core elements of developmental relationships. From the perspective of participating youth, these elements are:

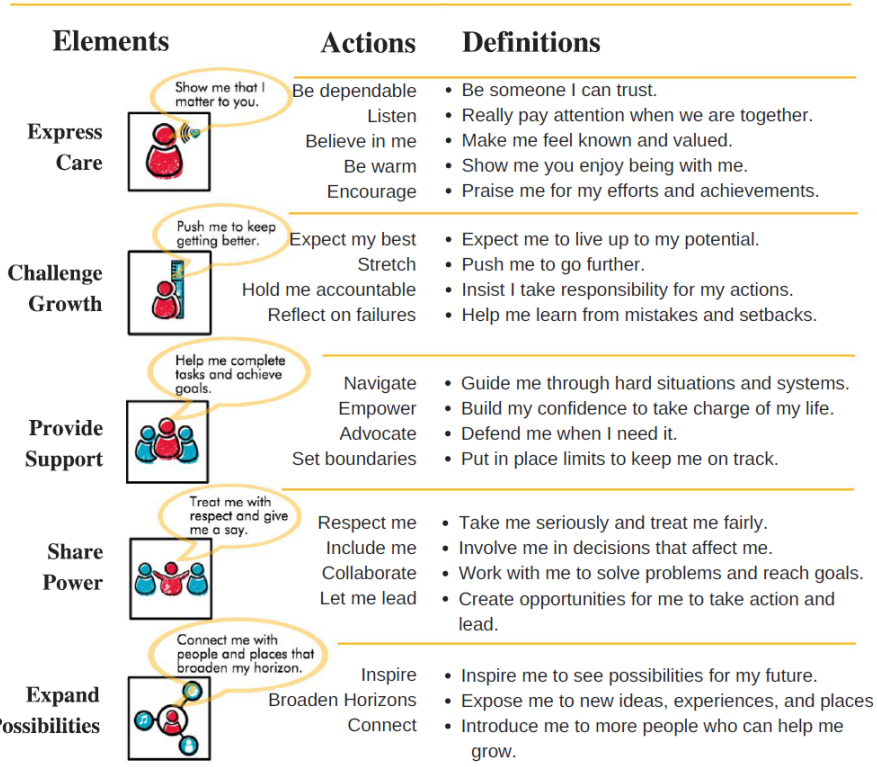
- Express Care: Show that you like me and want the best for me.
- Challenge Growth: Insist that I try to continuously improve.
- Provide Support: Help me complete the tasks and achieve goals.
- Share Power: Hear my voice and let me share in making decisions.
- Expand Possibility: Expand my horizons and connect me to opportunities.

  (Pekel et al., 2015, p. 3).

Adults can express each element through the use of several "actions" (See Figure 1). For example, an adult who is seeking to share their relational power with a youth can do so by showing them respect, which can be accomplished by taking them seriously and treating them fairly; by including the youth in decisions that impact them; by working collaboratively with the youth to solve problems; and by providing the youth with leadership opportunities.

Figure 1

The Developmental Relationships Framework



Note. Reprinted from "Relationships first: Creating connections that help young people thrive", Roehlkepartain, Initial, et al., 2017, *Search Institute.*

The Search Institute (2013) has begun to answer Li and Julian's (2012) original call to explore developmental relationships. Researchers at the Search Institute have successfully developed a theoretical understanding of developmental relationships, identified the adjustable facets of these relationships, and have created a measurement tool, thereby accomplishing three of the four focus areas they committed to regarding studying and understanding developmental relationships. Their focus on developmental relationships now turns to utilizing and implementing this information within both educational and community programming in order to support the growth of these important relationships in youths' lives.

Exploring Developmental Relationships in Applied Settings

The developmental relationships framework has been used to measure and understand developmental relationships across diverse settings. For example, it has been used within American families (Pekel et al., 2015), schools and communities (Pekel et al., 2018) and to measure the extent to which youth experience these relationships worldwide (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). Unfortunately, it was concluded that youth globally are not experiencing an adequate number of developmental relationships with non-family adults, which is problematic because it means that these youth are not benefitting from the positive impacts that developmental relationships can have on their developmental potential (Pekel et al., 2018; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). In addition, youth with low socioeconomic status generally experience lower levels of developmental relationships and lower quality relationships (Pekel et al., 2018; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). While there are numerous factors influencing this discrepancy (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018), Pekel et al. (2018) attributed the discrepancy to structural factors within organizations, including staff's general lack of time dedicated to building relationships, dysfunctional relationships among adult staff and high turnover rates of staff. Fortunately, as I discuss below, researchers have suggested that certain environments may be especially conducive to developmental relationships.

Schools may be the best environments in which to build developmental relationships (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). These locations may be especially important because one study found that student-teacher relationships did not differ based on students' socioeconomic status (Scales et al., 2020). Schools may also be important sites considering that as students age, their relationships with non-parenting adults become more important to them (Sethi & Scales, 2020). For example, it has been found that improving students' relationships with their teachers has been linked to positive outcomes including increased levels of academic motivation, a positive

perception of their school's climate, and to increased perception of their teacher's instructional quality (Scales et al., 2020). Additionally, students experience all five elements of developmental relationships with their teachers, and these relationships motivate students to perform well (Sethi & Scales, 2020). While there is great potential within schools to promote adolescent wellbeing using developmental relationships, as I discuss below, these efforts are hindered and often prevented due to the structure of schools.

In particular, even when teachers understand the importance and benefits of building developmental relationships with their students (McKay & Macomber, 2021), within schools there is often minimal time for educators to dedicate towards intentionally building these relationships with students (Kenner & Raab, 2021). This has led researchers such as Kenner and Raab (2021) to argue that schools and educators are missing a key opportunity to promote robust adolescent development. As a result, there is a need for unique wraparound intervention programs that intentionally focus on building and maintaining meaningful relationships between students and caring school staff. The All in for Youth program has been implemented within five schools in Edmonton, Alberta and may present a unique site from which to further explore students' experiences of meaningful relationships with non-parenting adults.

The All in For Youth Initiative

Mission and Theory of Change

The All in for Youth (AIFY) initiative was established in 2016 and was implemented in five Edmonton K-12 schools (AIFY & Community University Partnership [CUP], n.d.-b.). AIFY's goal is to provide comprehensive wraparound supports to youth and their families and is rooted in the following theory of change: "Children and families in vulnerable school communities have complex needs. Education alone cannot meet these needs. Giving children and

families access to wraparound school-based support will help children and their families thrive. In turn, children will achieve success in both school and life" (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-a., p.15). The initiative is composed of 10 community partners who work together collaboratively to provide in- and out-of-school supports to youths and their families within each school (United Way, n.d.). With successful implementation in five demonstration schools, AIFY has expanded into three additional schools, and is now working towards maintaining these programs using the AIFY model (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.).

AIFY Students and Families

The AIFY initiative now operates within eight inner-city schools in Edmonton (United Way, n.d.-a.). Students who attend these schools often have complex needs and face barriers to achieving academic success and wellbeing. AIFY students and families have reported facing adverse life events including poverty, addictions, domestic violence, and coping with anxiety and depression. Many students and families belong to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and may also be refugees or newcomers to Canada (United Way, n.d.-a.; United Way, n.d.-b.).

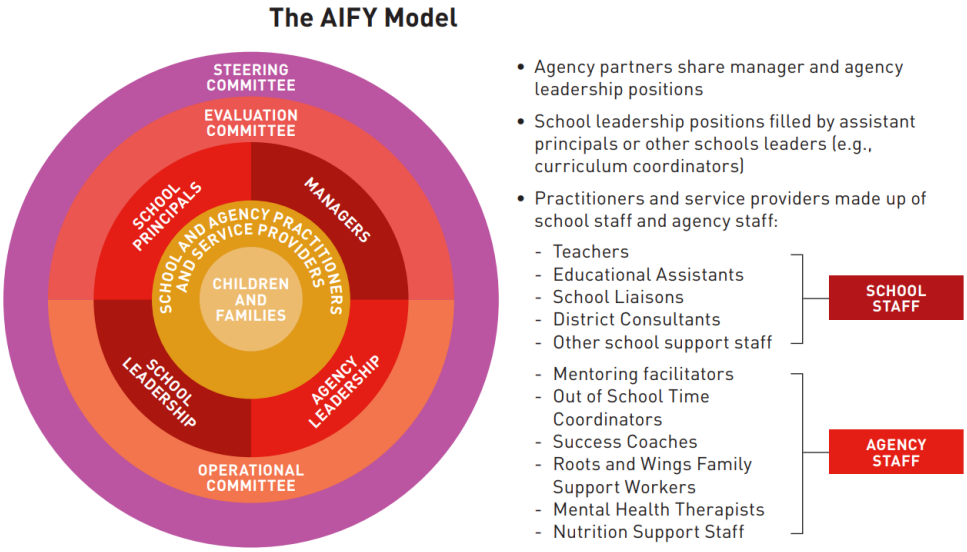
AIFY Model of Support

The AIFY model (see Figure 2) consists of a steering committee, agency and school leadership teams, as well as agency and school staff who provide services and supports directly to youths and their families (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-a.). The model relies on collaboration between all 10 of AIFY's community partners who have a shared vision of successfully meeting all of a student's needs (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). Together, these community partnerships provide the following supports to students and their families: connecting youth with adult mentors and providing leadership opportunities; specialized nutritional support to youth, both in- and out-of-

school by providing students with healthy meals and snacks; access to Success Coaches within the school who build close relationships with youths in order to promote their academic success and support positive development; before and after school programs that support youths' wholistic development; mental health support for both youths and their families; and within-home family supports that target whole families' well-being (United Way, n.d.-a.).

Figure 2

The AIFY Model



Note. Reprinted from "All in For Youth: Year 3 evaluation report", AIFY & CUP, n.d.-a

Expected Outcomes and Evaluation of Impacts

In accordance with wraparound's universal theory of change (Walker, 2008), the AIFY initiative developed a logic model that details short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes (see Figure 2; AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). Short-term outcomes were expected to occur within the first two years of AIFY's implementation within schools; mid-term outcomes were expected to occur within the third, fourth and fifth years; and long-term outcomes are projected to occur within

another four years (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). In order to determine whether or not the AIFY initiative met their expected mid-term outcomes, and to explore emerging impacts the program had on youth and their families, AIFY partnered with the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) at the University of Alberta to conduct yearly evaluations. Consequently, the evaluation of AIFY's outcomes have occurred yearly since 2019 and focus on assessing AIFY's mid-term impacts (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-a.; n.d.-b.; n.d.-c.). Collectively, these evaluations have shown consistent impacts spanning five diverse outcome areas, including:

- *Quality teaching and learning.* School staff are able to focus on and be supported in their teaching and learning objectives with students and families.
- *Family support.* Families have access to supports in schools that contribute to their overall wellbeing and are able to build skills to maintain healthy family functioning over time.
- *In-school*. Students have access to supports in school that contribute to their overall wellbeing and help them build skills to achieve school success.
- *Out-of-school*: Students and families have access to out-of-school supports (e.g., after school programming, summer programming, community programs) that contribute to their overall wellbeing and help them to build skills to achieve success in life.
- *Systems change.* The collaborative efforts of the partnership contribute to changes in current operating systems (e.g., schools, government sectors, social service industries) that allow the complex needs of students and families in school communities to be more effectively and efficiently met.

  (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c., p. Appendix)

Within each of these outcome areas, the AIFY logic model details specific short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. While the total number of outcomes across all five areas totals 29 in the most recent evaluation (covering the September 2020 – August 2021 school year), of interest to this study are two related outcomes (one short-term and the other mid-term) within the outcome area of in-school impacts (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). These include the short-term goal of, "Positive relationships *built* with caring adults in the school" and the continued mid-term goal of, "Positive relationships *maintained* between students and caring adults in the school" (italics added, AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.).

What is unique about the fifth-year evaluation was its focus on alumni students' experiences of having attended a high school that had implemented the AIFY initiative. Alumni students are those who have graduated from an AIFY school. Data was collected and used to explore the outcomes that students experienced as a result of having received support through AIFY. Alumni experiences can also shed light on the two goals related to building and maintaining positive relationships with caring adults in the school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences of how caring adults built positive relationships with them.

Similarities and Differences Between Evaluation and Research

Before proceeding into the methods section of this study, I will briefly discuss the difference between evaluation and research. This differentiation is important as the qualitative data used for this research study was collected for the evaluation of the fifth year of the AIFY initiative (see AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). Although collected and used for evaluative means, it is nevertheless appropriate to use this data for research purposes. As noted by Scriven (2013),

"…*there is no generic difference between research and evaluation,* since most professional program evaluation, for example, is a highly respectable kind of research" (p. 169-170). According to Scriven (2013), the difference between evaluation and research is not in either's purpose, although this is a widespread misunderstanding. While both research and evaluation can be (and are) used to produce knowledge *and* inform decision making, the real difference is that evaluation extends beyond the scope of research. Whereas research involves defining phenomena, evaluation involves the identification and evaluation of something's "merit, worth, or significance" (p. 170), within a specific context (Scriven, 2013).

This distinction has been echoed by Patton (2008) who states that, "to evaluate something means determining its merit, worth, value, or significance" (p. 5). He goes on to assert that evaluation is about more than producing knowledge. Evaluation is about actively using the knowledge developed to begin taking action. This call to begin using the information we create also separates evaluation from research, the latter which is more concerned with using information to create broad generalizations. This leads Patton (2008) to identify research as being conclusion-oriented and concerned with knowledge and truth, whereas evaluation is decision-oriented and involves action.

Finally, according to Mertens (2019) evaluation and research differ in terms of their purpose, method, and use. She asserts that evaluation has an inherently political purpose because it can be used to determine a program's merit and worth and thus contributes to decisions made about how to address social problems. By extension then, evaluation occurs within political and organizational contexts and thus to conduct evaluations requires a different type of skills and methodology than those used in research. Lastly, she notes that, historically, evaluation and research have been used differently, although this is changing as evaluation is now understood

not only as its own discipline, but also a transdiscipline that overlaps with other disciplines (Mertens, 2019). As the above perspectives illustrate, even amongst scholars in the field of evaluation there is no agreed upon differentiation between evaluation and research. Where one scholar says that differentiation based on purpose is a misunderstanding, another scholar claims that purpose is a foundational difference. However, there does appear to be some agreement that evaluation subsumes and goes a step beyond research.

Utilizing AIFY Evaluation Data

In sum, while evaluation and research have similarities and in fact intersect at times, there are still key (sometimes multiple) differences between evaluation and research (Mertens, 2019; Patton, 2008; Scriven, 2013). As such, while the data used in this study was originally collected and used for an evaluative purpose, the analysis in this study does not serve an evaluative purpose. In other words, the purpose of the current study is not to evaluate whether developmental relationships that are formed within wraparound schools are better or stronger than developmental relationships formed in a school that does not utilize wraparound supports. Rather, this study is meant to describe how adults build these important relationships (from students' perspectives), not whether adults build better or stronger relationships within a wraparound context compared to any other context.

Chapter 3: Methods

Positionality Statement

Reflexivity plays a critical role in any qualitative research study and requires researchers to position themselves in relation to what they are exploring (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This entails asking how we, as researchers, are active members in making meaning and influencing the outcomes of any study (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). I will now briefly discuss my vested interest in the outcomes, and how my previous experiences and background influenced my findings. Beginning with the development of a research question, my original goal was twofold. First, I wanted to ask a question that would be suitable for a thesis and that would be possible with the data I had been provided. Secondly, I wanted to pose a question that would provide something meaningful to the AIFY team. I developed two research questions after having listened to the audio recordings of the interviews. As I was listening, I was taking notes of key words and patterns I was noticing across the interviews. Some of these patterns included students talking about how their relationships had impacted their lives. Additionally, I noticed certain school staff being repeatedly mentioned across multiple interviews. I began thinking about not only how these relationships impacted students, but also why certain staff members kept being repeated. I was wondering, "What are these adults doing correctly to be brought up by multiple students?" Given these insights, I originally proposed two questions, the current question and then a follow-up that explored the outcomes students experienced because of these relationships. I then brought these questions to my contact at the Community-University Partnership (CUP) where the AIFY evaluation study was based. She suggested that the second research question had already been examined and was thus unnecessary. However, the first question had the

potential to provide new information. As such, I kept the first research question as it appears here.

I believe reflexivity played a critical role in analysis. As I discuss in the data analysis section, I was unsuccessful at creating the first draft of a code chart that could be reliably used between myself and a second coder. Upon reflection, I realized my coding had been guided by previous literature on developmental relationships. Perhaps this occurred because of my previous experience with developmental relationships in a Winnipeg school. It is important to know that I have experience working closely with students in grades 6 through 12. I was the Assistant Dean at a private K-12 school in Winnipeg, and part of my job (unofficially) was to get to know the students and build relationships with them. Having read the literature on developmental relationships, and particularly having read extracts of students' experiences of close relationships, I began thinking back to my time in the high school and what the students had shared with me when I left. In this way, I began looking at my previous experience with students through the lens of developmental relationships, and this impacted my ability to neutrally code according to the research question. Having realized this, I revised the code chart (See Appendix A), and the second version was more successful at allowing the second coder and myself to come to an agreement.

I also had to practice reflexivity during the theming process. Initially, I was trying to create a hierarchy of increasingly important adults that would characterize some relationships as more important to students than other relationships. Fortunately, I realized this error lied in the assumption I had when I created the research question. This assumption was that some adults were doing something *correct* when it came to building relationships with students. In contrast, this also meant that some adults were doing something *wrong*, or not at all. Thinking back to the

research question, the purpose of the study was not to identify which adults were better at building relationships, it was simply to explore students' experiences of building relationships with caring adults. Thus, after I had recognized and put aside this assumption, the theming process became much easier.

Research Question

Through this study, I sought to explore the following question: What are students' experiences of how caring adults built positive relationships with them?

Participants

Six alumni students participated in the interviews that make up the data for this thesis. Participants ranged in age from 20 – 23 years old with a mean age of 21. All participants attended the same high school. Five participants attended the school for three years, and one participant attended the school for four years.

Data Collection

This data was previously collected as part of the All in For Youth year five evaluation. Five interviews were conducted from June 20, 2021, to July 14, 2021. The date of one interview was not reported. Interviews were conducted over the phone and ranged in length from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. See Appendix B for the interview guide. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and initially transcribed using Otter.ai technology. I used this initial transcription as a template and re-transcribed the interviews myself to correct errors produced by the Otter.ai transcription.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the interview data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method that allows researchers to identify patterns and themes within a data set in

relation to a research question. My analysis was guided by an inductive semantic approach. This means that I was not coding with any particular theory or literature about adolescent relationships in mind. Instead, my coding was "data-driven" and codes were derived from describing what the participant said. While there is no single agreed upon way to conduct thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six phases of analysis, which I followed for the current study. More specifically, I began by familiarizing myself with the data and taking notes. This occurred when I initially listened to the six audio recordings and when I engaged in transcription. I decided to organize the interviews by length, and as such began coding the longest interview first.

To engage in the second phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a second coder and I began generating initial codes from the first interview. Given that the secondary data I used had been collected for a different reason (i.e., it had not been collected with my research question in mind), we began coding by focusing on sections of text that represented something meaningful about the participants' relationship with a school related adult. This is important to note because we were looking for a detailed account of one *aspect* of the data, i.e. the relationship between youths and adults. Therefore, when we were coding, we had to ask ourselves if a section of text was speaking to an *outcome* that a student had experienced (e.g., a higher grade on an assignment, increased self-confidence, etc.) or if that text was speaking to something important about the *process* or *dynamic* of the youth-adult relationship. We had to remind ourselves that we were not coding for outcomes, as this had already been examined by other researchers working on the AIFY evaluation (See AIFY & CUP, n.d.c). Instead, we were coding for how the information linked to a relationship. As such, our coding was guided by the research question.

After separately coding the first interview, the second coder and myself compared our codes. Discrepancies were talked about until we agreed upon a code. I then developed a preliminary code chart which we used to recode interview one. Unfortunately, this code chart was ineffective as the second coder and myself had not only identified different sections of text being important, but when we had agreed upon sections of important text, we had applied different codes and thus identified that these parts were important for different reasons. As a result, I revisited and revised the code chart.

As per the process of reflexivity, I came to identify that the first version of the code chart had been developed using a deductive or 'theory-driven' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) whereby I was unintentionally developing codes that were related to the known literature on developmental relationships. For example, I was coding information as 'sharing power' instead of an 'opportunity for growth.'

Upon this realization, I revised the code chart and only included semantic or descriptive codes. The second coder and myself then separately used this new chart to code the second interview. Upon discussion, we found we had far greater agreement, and less disagreement, than we did when using the initial code chart on the first interview. New codes were created if a piece of text did not fit into an already existing code or could fit with a revised description of the code. We then re-coded interview one with this new chart. Afterwards, we compared our coding and discussed any disagreements until we reached consensus. We then continued with the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth interview in a similar fashion (i.e., we would code separately and then compare and discuss codes. We would make the necessary revision or addition to the code chart before proceeding to the next interview). After we coded all six interviews, I revised the code

chart a final time before we re-coded all six interviews using this final chart. In this way, all interviews were coded using the same chart.

After coding was complete, I moved into the third phase of analysis, "searching for themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I amalgamated all data points and grouped them according to their corresponding code. I then focused on the group of data points as a whole and started to develop preliminary themes and subthemes, looking at which coded groups seemed to work together in answering the research question. I then drafted an early version of a mind map with candidate themes and subthemes. Next, I began the fourth phase which involved reviewing themes. Looking at the codes together as a group, and reading the corresponding data extracts, I decided that one group was not cohesive, and thus one code was deconstructed, and the data points were added to already existing code groups. Some data points were recoded to better reflect what was important about the piece of text. After this refinement, I looked at the candidate themes and subthemes in relation to the data set as a whole and determined that they 'fit' together well and were able to answer the research question. I then revised the mind map to reflect these established themes and subthemes. I then consulted the second coder regarding the changes made, and we discussed data points that I was undecided about. Together we worked on the fifth phase of thematic analysis, which involved naming the themes and creating preliminary definitions. Finally, I continued to the sixth phase, which involved writing the results.

Chapter 4: Results

After analysis, I settled on three themes that answered the research question: What are students' experiences of how caring adults build positive relationships with them? These themes consist of: (1) variety of interactions, (2) caring skills, and (3) fostering supportive environments. I also found a fourth theme, enduring relationships, that, although unrelated to the research question, captured how some student-teacher/coach relationships continued after the student graduated from high school.

Variety of Interactions

This theme reveals that students' relationships with caring adults involved many different *types* of interactions, each with a specific focus. These interactions can be understood as the adult providing something which the student received. Three subthemes illustrate the types of interactions students and adults had.

Give Me Support

Adults within the school environment provided students with wholistic supports which often went beyond the classroom and involved helping them through personal problems. At times, this support even extended beyond the school grounds to directly help students and their families.

Help Me with My Schoolwork. Students described many instances where adults provided academic support. This could have been help with a specific academic task or more generally with their academic life. While in some instances the support provided by their teachers could be considered part of their job, it reportedly felt personal and was meaningful to the students:

> My computer sciences teacher got me into Adobe Photoshop. And he got me all the Adobe programs. And we had such creative freedom when it came to like video and photography and animation, that I got to be introduced to that program and I got to…basically learn all of those programs that would seem hard to a lot of people. But it came very easily when I had access to it as well.

To one student, a single act of compassion at a difficult time was memorable. "When my grandmother passed, it was right around the time of final exams. So, my English teacher talked with the principals, and I didn't even have to end up taking my final. And… yeah, he was super nice and supportive throughout it all." While some students experienced support from their teachers, others received support from their success coach. "It was interesting, because, I sat down with my success coach, and I told him my whole life story. Like, literally from birth. And then he set me up in order to get help, so I was able to actually continue and graduate." Perhaps surprisingly, even cafeteria staff were identified as important to supporting students' education. As one student noted, "There was so much support at my high school. Like I said, when I was doing my advance exams, we had to be there for 8:00 AM. The cafeteria people like, they had breakfast sandwiches for us." It is clear that within the school that interview participants attended, all types of staff were seen as supporting students' academics needs.

Listen and Help Me Cope. Caring adults also provided emotional support and talked with students during difficult times in their lives. This is significant because it implies these adults knew these students on a personal level and were aware of what was occurring in the students' lives outside of school. As one student said, "My success coach was definitely, uh…anytime like, my parents were fighting or like, during the time my grandmother passed away, or I was going through a breakup, like he…uh, helped me through a lot of that." Another

student spoke about how their success team worked together to support her during a significant life change and identified that they were pivotal in her social-emotional wellbeing. “The success team helped me with, dealing with the aftereffects of moving out of my parent’s home when I was 16. And they—they were able to help me with like, strengthening, um, friendships and bonds. Even after everything happened.” This spoke to the level of trust students had with these adults, although interestingly, only members of the success team were referenced when it came to providing this kind of emotional support.

Help Me Outside of School. Students also recalled how certain adults went “above and beyond” their roles and provided practical support to them outside of school. One interaction involved a teacher helping a student’s younger sibling: “My computer sciences teacher, to this day, is still a big influence on me and my family personally. Even, went out of his way to like, show my brother how to ride a bike too. And stuff like that.” In another example, a student’s success coach helped her reach a milestone, which was especially meaningful to her because the success coach continued to support her despite her previous failure:

> My success coach even helped me to go to Driver's Ed. Like take my tests and stuff like that. Even though sometimes I failed, right? He was still there to help me with that. So that helped me a lot, later on in life as well, because I eventually did get my license.

Not only was this out-of-school support important to these students but it was also the way adults acted during these times that resonated with students:

> Something that really blew my mind when I was moving out, was how careful and how well the success coaches tried recalculation. Like they didn't force me in any way. I never felt unsafe. But they tried so hard to like, keep things light. They tried to make it so that nothing that happened would harm me, or anybody I knew. And that was something I was

> really scared about when I was moving out. I was scared, I was gonna get my brothers taken away from my mom, and the whole family was gonna hate me. But like, that wasn't the case. They just wanted to help me get the independence I needed for people to respect me. And they did it in a way that was very mindful of my safety and my wellbeing.

Also significant, students recognized that these adults were acting in their best interest. Perhaps this is best displayed with a student who described an escalation in the support provided. As he described, when emotional support wasn't effective, his success coach acted outside of school to visit him, which was what finally got through to him:

> I used to be more into using alcohol and my success coach has helped me stay away from that. He gave suggestions and then he came to my house one day and he told me like, 'You're doing, like, completely not good,' and that was kind of like, that was definitely a huge check for me because I stopped thinking about it, less and less. And then today I don't need to. So that's one of the biggest ways he helped me, honestly.

Again, it is worth noting that, apart from the first example, all of the data related to this type of practical support occurred between students and success coaches.

Help me Grow

Multiple students described times when an adult provided an opportunity for them to mature or grow their skills and capabilities. Students spoke about adults promoting their growth in one of two ways.

Give me a Specific Task. Some adults reportedly promoted students' growth by directly giving them a new opportunity. For one student, this involved a summer job at her school. "Our school used to run summer camps for the incoming grade nines. And one of the years my success

coach asked me to do that." This position challenged the student as she tried to develop a bond with a younger student:

> I ended up just spending basically all of my time just hanging out with this one student with a disability, trying to get him to come out his shell. He was not super reserved but was kind of like the odd kid out. You could tell he was self-conscious about his disability because he was always trying to hide it. But he told the funniest stories and was just the quirkiest guy. One of my proudest moments was when a bunch of us were around a table and he took his sweater off and you could tell that he was comfortable.

Here it is evident that this opportunity boosted the participant's pride as she saw her perseverance pay off. At another point in time, she was also challenged to confront bullying behaviour:

> I remember one of the other kids was being mean to me. Like, making side comments about me. *laughs* And I was just like, fuming. And then I think one of them even said something about this younger student at one point. And I just like, shut that down right away. Like I was dealing with it when it was about me. But they said something about him. And I'm like, 'Okay, you need to stop.'

In this instance, even though this student was unwilling to stand up for herself, she grew to assert herself when the younger student became a target.

Inspire Me. Adults also indirectly helped students grow by inspiring them and showing them possibilities for their future. These possibilities included new hobbies and lifestyles, as one student recounted, "One skill I gained during my time at high school would be from gym class. Because of the teacher I had, it sparked a massive joy for being fit now. *chuckles* So now I've

become like, a body builder." Students were also inspired to embody qualities they admired in adults:

> My success coach has had a lasting impact on my life because *voice breaking* when I was going through everything, I ended up spending a lot of time with him. And seeing what all the other students had to go through. And then he just took it all. He listens to everything, and he'll take action to do whatever he can to help you. And it just, like…It blew my mind how somebody could be so resilient, and so strong, but so able and caring to help others. *Sniffs* I was like, 'I want to be like that.' 'I want to be as strong as my success coach is.'

Whether the adults were aware of it or not, their relationships with these students encouraged them to grow and influenced their futures.

We Don't Always Have to be Serious

Students also spoke about their relationships having a social component where interactions were more relaxed. Though not as structured as other interactions, they were just as important, if not more so, than the times when the adult provided support or an opportunity to grow. As one student stated,

> My favourite memory at high school was me teaching my success coach how to paint. Just like, him getting all giddy cause I would have him paint something or draw something before I gave him any tips or any advice. And we'd walk through it after and seeing his giddy face and the before and after pictures that he made. It was—it was really good.

It may have been that what the adult was providing was intangible; in other words, the mere act of making time for the student, without an explicit purpose, was meaningful. As one student said,

“My success coaches made me feel important. One of them would *always* talk with me like, ‘Well,’ like, ‘what's going on? What's new? What's exciting?’ Like, ‘What are you doing?’” Such interactions may have showed that the adult had a genuine interest in the student’s life.

Multifaceted Interactions

While most students provided examples of specific types of interactions, some students recalled that their relationships were characterized by multiple types of interactions. Here, one student identifies that their relationship with their success coach encompassed all three subthemes: “My success coach provided a lot of opportunities to grow, and just hang out and have fun. And was there when my life was getting like, hard or whatever, outside of school.” Moreso, this student related that her teacher helped her with her course work, but that she also enjoyed her company: “My art teacher was really nice. She was just like, a cool adult to talk to and, she really helped me with my art.” This may allude to the nature of different relationships students had, whereby some relationships were more developed than others.

Caring Skills

This theme encompasses caring skills that adults utilized which helped nurture close and meaningful relationships between themselves and the student. Three subthemes capture skills that students reported were important.

I Can Depend on You

This subtheme encompasses the skill of being dependable. These adults had repeatedly supported the student in the past, which meant students could count on them to be there in the future as well. This was true for students in the school environment; for example, “Whenever I was getting too stressed out, I’d go see whoever—whichever success coach was there. Because there was always one of them in the office,” and after school:

> There's been other kids in high school who have also struggled. And like, they've reached out to me when they were getting kicked out or whatever. And the Success Team all have a work phone. And so, whenever anything would happen, like when the people at school would come to me, I would message one of the success coaches, or all of them. *chuckles* Just to see who would respond first. And then they would just immediately get on it. And so, it was really cool. Cause it was like a support team for even when you're not in school.

In this example, the student reported acting as a middleman and referring other students to these adults for support. She also described knowing someone would answer her even when school had ended for the day. Together, these quotes also speak to how much these students trusted their success coaches in general, as they were comfortable receiving support from any coach. What reportedly mattered most was that there was always someone present either in their office, or on the other end of the phone. It may be no surprise that all adults who were referenced as being dependable were once again success coaches.

You Encourage Me

Students also spoke about receiving encouraging words from adults which students felt positively influenced their behaviour. One student spoke about how, with both her teacher and success coach's encouragement, she took a new approach to her university application:

> I've been pretty independent. But my art teacher and my success coach pushed me to pursue my art portfolio in a new way. Because I decided to do all of my pieces digitally, which is not very common because a lot of schools value traditional 'paint on the paper' art over digital. I still was accepted into university with that portfolio. So. Yeah, like them

> pushing me to pursue that I guess. But besides that, I was pretty independent with my schoolwork and stuff.

The encouragement that the student received from these adults seems particularly important, as this student reported valuing her independence. With these adults' encouragement, she was able to take a risk and do something important to her that was ultimately successful. In contrast, some students may require more general encouragement that they are capable of achieving their goals in life. As one student noted:

> It stressed me out so much as a young adult, as well as a teenager. I'm like, 'I'm never gonna get to travel. I'm never going to get my learner's license. I'm never gonna get a good job.' I had such poor self-esteem growing up. And my success coach was like, 'Okay, you're going to do this. We're going to write this list down.' We made a list of all of things I never ever thought I'd get to doing. And I eventually checked off the list just this year. And it's like, it came with time. And it helped so much that that list was waiting for me.

In this sense, the coach's encouragement helped this participant think in terms of long-term plans. As she noted, having something concrete helped ground her and also served as a memory of her achievements and her capabilities.

You Always Know What I Need

This subtheme alluded to adults being emotionally intelligent and in-tune with their own and the student's emotions. As a result, they were able to provide an appropriate response to the situation. "My success coach just knows never when to overstep. Right? Like, he knew when you just needed a shoulder to cry on, or he knew when you needed, words of wisdom or advice.

But like, he always seemed to know when to give that." Another student recalled a time when she was overwhelmed, and her coach gave her the space she needed:

> My success coach was the only one in the room when I ran in and hid. He was on his computer, and he looks over and then he did a double take. He was like, "Wait. What are you doing under that desk?" *laughs* And I just explained that I was feeling really anxious so I just wanted to be somewhere small where I can control what was going on. And he was like, "Okay. I'll check back in 10 minutes. Stay under there as long as you want."

Instead of escalating this student by insisting she talk about what was going on or asking her to come out from under the desk, this adult was patient and reassuring and allowed the student the time she needed. This awareness was especially helpful if the adult needed to hold a student accountable for their actions:

> I used to play this trading card game and I had a bunch of extra cards I didn't want. I brought them into the room to donate them. And for whatever reason, I thought it was okay for me to destroy these cards because I gave them to the room. I was with a couple of friends, and I was ripping them up. My success coach caught us and man, he was pissed off. Rightly so. And he was able to handle the situation without making me feel really terrible. I think that was the first time I've really had an adult figure in my life handled a situation properly. And I think he did a good job of that.

The adult's ability to handle this situation appropriately, even though he was angry, was especially impactful for this student.

Fostering Supportive Environments

The final theme in relation to the research question refers to how adults cultivated supportive environments which were conducive to building relationships. A supportive environment allowed relationships to form not only between students and staff, but also amongst students. Three subthemes explain how adults fostered these environments.

Work as a United Team

Students identified that it was helpful when the adults in their school worked together as a team and communicated to help meet their needs. One student identified he found this communication important by stating that, “I really liked a lot of the staff at my high school. They all communicated with each other, which I thought was a good thing.” Another student was able to connect with a community mentor through a success coach: “I remember this one success coach who was also amazing. She helped me get set up with my Big Sister, essentially.” Yet another student specifically referenced the collaborative work of the AIFY team, which helped her succeed: “When I moved out of my parent’s house, I thought I was gonna have to drop out completely. So, I went to my grade coordinator, and he's the one that introduced me to the success coaches, and the support team and everything. Together they’re an unstoppable force.” Regardless of whether students utilized the adults within the school, it is clear that they still noticed and appreciated their collective effort.

Help Me Make Friends

This subtheme refers to when an environment or program was intentionally structured in a way that students were encouraged to interact with each other. This subtheme is unique as it relates to a specific program run by the success coaches called The Breakfast Club. This program helped students make friends. “Another great thing I think the success coaches did was set up a kind of space for us all to interact with each other.” To many students this program was

important because it provided a sense of belonging to a community. As one student said, before she found The Breakfast Club, she spent most of her time alone:

> My friend group from Grade 9 kind of disintegrated. Every day at lunch, I was just sitting by myself at my locker. Sometimes I would have a friend stop by and we would chat. But it was basically me by myself every lunch. One day my friend who knew I didn't usually bring lunches was like, 'Hey, there's this room and they give you free food.' But I was like 'I'm not just gonna walk into a random room and get free food.' But she dragged me to the room anyways. Inside they were all playing card games and stuff and I had this card game that I enjoyed playing and teaching to people.

She continues by explaining how the success coach acted as a gateway to help her connect with her peers:

> I went back for a few days, but I just stood back and watched them because I didn't have the confidence to insert myself. And then when the bell rang, and everyone was leaving, I asked the success coach if I could teach everyone my card game. And then I taught it the next time that people went there. I taught everyone that card game and I was just a part of that room for the next three years. *chuckles*

Taken together, The Breakfast Club allowed this student to find a new community within the school. Another student noted the confidence she gained as a result of this community:

> I think my confidence was built a lot during my time in high school. I think just knowing that I had a place in school, cause I'm super shy and kind of reserved in new areas. But knowing that, I had a spot and a person in school that I could always fall back on, like, I wasn't afraid to come out of my shell either a little quicker or like, right off the bat. I found that really helpful.

This sense of community and belonging resonated with many of the students interviewed, and perhaps it was no surprise that the club's attendance nearly doubled from one year to the next. Fortunately, the program was able to accommodate this growth by upgrading to a larger room within the school.

Give Me Somewhere I Feel Safe

This subtheme shows how The Breakfast Club environment was a physically and emotionally safe space for students within their school. This safety allowed them to open up more than they otherwise would have. For example, "The space that my success coach set up wasn't very judgmental or…I don't know how else to word it. But it was a nice place for us to be able to express ourselves and not really have to worry about being judged or many other things." For another student, the Breakfast Club room was a physically safe space that she sought out in a time of need: "This one time my parents were fighting, and it was making me really, really anxious. And I ran out of my class up to The Breakfast Club. And then I just hid under a desk in the corner of the room." This may sound familiar, as an earlier quote exemplified how the success coach responded upon seeing a student hiding. All in all, this information speaks to how successful the coaches were at fostering supportive environments.

Enduring Relationships

Although separate from the research question, it was noteworthy that some students continued to speak with supportive adults after they had graduated and left their high school. For half of these students, their relationships were not confined to their period in school, although their reasons for staying in contact varied between practical and personal. While one student kept in contact with her teachers so she could use them as references for scholarships and jobs, two other students kept in contact with their old success coach for additional support. While one

student was apprehensive about telling her family that she had withdrawn again from university, she felt comfortable seeking advice from her former success coach:

> I went to university and then took a year off. And then I went into university again after that year break. And now I'm stopping again. And like, I just don't know. I was actually planning on talking to my success coach about some of my ideas when we get together in a few weeks.

For the other student, keeping in contact with his old success coach proved to be central to his wellbeing:

> My success coach helped me though a lot of rough patches in my life and I talked to him after I graduated. Like I was depressed for a while and a lot of things were not going great in my life. I think that was a pretty low point for me and my success coach convinced me to start doing therapy and a bunch of other stuff that really helped me and improved my life. During high school I never really considered therapy and it wasn't really talked about. But after I graduated is when I started to pursue that. It's been a little under a year since then and I'm pretty happy where I'm at right now.

It may not be surprising that both students described their coach as a father figure.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study has shown that adults in one AIFY school built meaningful relationships with their students in three ways. In particular, they had diverse interactions with students, enacted caring skills, and fostered supportive environments. In addition, students described relationships that endured beyond their school experience. Through the following discussion section, I will describe how the results of this study relate to the research on developmental relationships and how wraparound supports may be well-suited for studying developmental relationships. I will follow this with describing the implications of this study. Next, I will discuss the limitations of this study, and end by suggesting future directions.

With respect to the first theme, variety of interactions, students described how caring adults provided a mixture of support and opportunities to grow, and yet at other times they simply made conversation with students. This social element may be a strategy used by adults to strengthen their relationships with youth (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). In this way, adults signal to youth that their relationship encompasses more than just practical elements, and that they will be there not only for difficult times, but also the good (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). In addition, this study found that adults utilized different skills to enhance their interactions with students. Interestingly, two of these 'caring skills' are included as actions within the developmental relationships framework (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). Dependability and encouragement are both actions which convey the message that a student matters to an adult, and they fall under the element "express care". Within the framework, dependability suggests to students that an adult is trustworthy, while encouragement is a form of praise (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). This is not the only overlap between my analysis and the developmental relationships framework.

While I conducted my analysis at the semantic level, arguably, if I had conducted a theoretical analysis guided by the developmental relationships framework, it appears multiple actions from across numerous elements would have been identified. For example, as described above in my results section, a student participant provided an anecdote about destroying some playing cards he had previously donated. As this student recalled, his success coach was 'pissed off' when he saw what the student was doing. However, he was still able to approach the situation appropriately. While I coded this as an example of emotional intelligence, if I were to interpret the data through the lens of the developmental relationships framework, this interaction could have been interpreted to be about the success coach holding this student accountable for his actions. Thus, this interaction would have exemplified the element of 'challenge growth' as it involved the success coach pushing the student to improve (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). As another example, another portion of data was coded as a type of practical support, but through the framework it could have been interpreted as being about success coaches advocating on the student's behalf. In particular, this portion of data related to the student's experience of leaving her parent's house and being afraid her younger siblings would be removed. As a reminder, this student went on to say, "They just wanted to help me get the independence I needed for people to respect me. And they did it in a way that was very mindful of my safety and my wellbeing." Although I coded this information as "practical support," this extract could be interpreted as success coaches standing up for this student. Within the developmental relationships framework, advocacy falls within the element of 'providing support,' and within our analysis it was also coded as support (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). Regardless of the specific codes used, this data supports the interpretation of the meaningful relationships that students have in the AIFY initiative as developmental relationships.

Defining these meaningful relationships as developmental relationships is important because clear definitions are required for accurate and rigorous research. As discussed in Chapter 2 (my literature review), arriving at accurate and consistent definitions of constructs is a first step towards research that has an eventual goal of being able to strengthen developmental relationships (Pekel, 2019). In other words, with clear definitions, intervention programs can measure their progress towards building and strengthening relationships. In addition, AIFY's outcome goals focused on youths' meaningful relationships with caring adults. However, as noted by Pekel (2019) while caring is an important element of the developmental relationships framework, simply showing care is not enough to promote robust relationships. Thus, this study can shed light on which elements of caring resonated with students in the AIFY schools.

Finally, this study provides preliminary evidence that wraparound initiatives implemented within schools can be fertile ground for studying adolescents' relationships with non-parenting adults. AIFY wraparound schools could represent a unique context when compared to traditional schools because they have already prioritized building positive relationships between students and adults as evidenced by the two outcome goals mentioned earlier (AIFY & CUP, n.d.-c.). AIFY schools may also be unique given that the principles of wraparound (e.g., strengths-based philosophy) may be well aligned with the underlying principles of the developmental relationships framework (Bruns et al., 2008; Pekel et al., 2015). Moreso, one can also see the parallels between the wraparound principles and the elements and actions of the developmental relationships framework. For example, the element "sharing power" can be accomplished by taking the youth seriously and treating them fairly, including the youth in the decision-making process, and by working collaboratively to help solve problems (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). This aligns well with some of the principles of wraparound,

including “family voice and choice” and “collaboration” (Bruns et al., 2008). An important avenue of future research could be to examine these parallels.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Perhaps most significantly, this study speaks to the unique role that success coaches play within AIFY schools. Success coaches are one type of intervention method within the AIFY initiative (United Way, n.d.-a). These coaches are caring adults located within the school whose jobs are to help “motivate students to attend school, succeed academically, reduce high risk behaviours and increase positive behaviors” (United Way, n.d.-a). Collectively, these efforts result in students developing “positive esteem, adaptability, persistence and social and emotional connectedness that increase students’ potential to succeed in school and prepares them for adulthood” (United Way, n.d.-a).

It is imperative for both policy makers and practitioners to understand this role and recognize its value in AIFY schools. When looking at which adults were associated with different kinds of support, we can see that only success coaches were identified as providing emotional support and, other than a report from one participant, success coaches were the only adults to provide practical support. In contrast, teachers were more likely to be reported as providing academic support. The latter may not be surprising considering that academic support is a relatively standard and expected type of support for teachers to give considering their roles and duties within the educational system. However, this may also allude to the different roles that success coaches and teachers play in AIFY schools. Past literature suggests that teachers do not have the *time* to build relationships (Kenner & Raab, 202), implying that if only they were given more time, they could build robust relationships with their students. However, this study may show that, arguably, it is outside of the *scope* of a teacher’s role to prioritize building robust

developmental relationships with students while *also* expected to teach the curriculum, regardless of the amount of time they have. As an adage says, it takes a village to raise a child and within AIFY schools, we can see that teachers and success coaches work together to meet the holistic needs of their students. Neither role is more important than the other. What is important is that they are complimentary and have the shared goal of supporting positive adolescent development.

Employing both teachers and success coaches within schools may be ideal as both adults contribute differently to developmental relationships. Using a sample of middle- and high-school aged students, one study examined how often youth experienced each of the five elements of developmental relationships with different adults, including teachers and coaches (who were grouped under 'program leaders'; Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). Students experienced comparable levels of growth and of sharing power between both teachers and program leaders. While teachers provided more support, students experienced more care and expanding of possibilities from program leaders (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). This supports the notion that teachers and success coaches may play different, but complimentary roles within schools. Additionally, incorporating more non-family adults into youths' lives is beneficial because youth do best when they have at least one strong developmental relationship and many smaller ones (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). Importantly, this shared effort may have the potential to change the life trajectories of certain students.

As discussed earlier (Chapter 2), youth with higher socio-economic status (SES) tend to have access to their parents' networks, and as such they have the opportunity to experience a greater number of strong developmental relationships with non-family adult mentors as compared to youth with lower SES (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). Youth with high SES also

have more regular contact with non-family adults (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). In comparison, youth with lower SES often report having few, if any, strong developmental relationships with non-family adults (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). This difference has been attributed to a lack of access to non-family adults for lower SES youth (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2018). However, when lower SES youth are given the opportunity to develop these relationships with their teachers, these relationships have been found to be of the same quality as their higher SES peers (Sethi & Scales, 2020). This supports the notion that access is critical for lower SES and otherwise marginalized youth. If policy makers and practitioners can provide these students with access to non-family adults with whom they can build strong developmental relationships, there is reason to expect their quality of relationships to be the same as their peers. In this way, providing marginalized students with access to success coaches through schools may be especially impactful for these students.

Although anecdotal, this brings to mind one of the interviews used in this study. When comparing our coding, the second coder and I spoke about how at first, this one particular interview was relatively 'easy' to code in that the student wasn't talking much about her relationships with school staff. Rather she focused on her participation in extracurricular activities in high school and the study habits she learnt that served her well in university. This student wasn't talking about receiving emotional or practical support; in fact, she was the only interviewee who did not mention the success coaches or AIFY team. Instead, this student spoke about being inspired by her athletic coaches and finding balance in her life between work and hobbies. She also talked about the opportunities she had been given in high school to network with important figures in her community. This was also the student who kept in touch with her teachers so she could use them as references for scholarships and jobs. What the second coder

and I had initially perceived as 'easy' coding, was due in part because, as it became clear to us, this student simply had different *needs* than the other participants in the study. This did not mean that this student's relationships with teachers and athletic coaches were not important to her, it meant that her relationship dynamics were different because her needs were different. Instead of focusing on emotional and practical support like the other participants, her interactions focused on promoting growth.

This study has shown that student-adult relationships within AIFY schools are dynamic and help meet students' unique needs. Students in this study described experiencing different types of supports, from more direct academic support to support that extended into their personal lives beyond the school. This is what makes the AIFY initiative distinct from traditional supports offered in schools. Through the creation and implementation of its Success Coaches, the AIFY team is signalling their understanding of how important developmental relationships are to students' wellbeing and educational success. As both Li and Julian (2012) and Pekel et al., (2018) argue, developmental relationships are the "key ingredient" to any successful interventions with youth. Considering this information, it makes sense that the AIFY initiative included building and maintaining positive relationships into their outcome measures.

In comparison, policy makers at traditional schools may first need to be convinced about the importance of developmental relationships before they are willing to take steps to intentionally promote them (Pekel, 2019). This may mean that, while policy makers are discussing the merit or value of developmental relationships, they are missing real opportunities to support the youth who are currently enrolled in and attending their schools. For this reason, I take the position that Kenner and Raab (2021) are correct in stating that many schools are currently missing a critical window to positively influence adolescents' development. As such, to

the extent that many traditional schools are not utilizing what is empirically known about promoting youth development, students are consequentially unable to actualize their full potential within these schools.

Fortunately, this may not be the case with the eight AIFY schools in Edmonton due in part to the role of their success coaches. As has been shown in this study, these success coaches are providing supplementary supports that are outside of, yet complementary to, teachers' roles. This study highlights the potential that wraparound programs have for promoting students' developmental needs and the important roles that relationships play. In particular, the AIFY initiative provides a unique role for Canadian scholars and policy makers to contribute to a growing body of research and literature in both wraparound supports in educational settings and developmental relationships, within a Canadian context.

Limitations

The largest limitation of this study lies in the nature of secondary data. This means that the data analysed in this study was not collected with my specific research question in mind. Rather, it was designed to capture students' experiences of attending an AIFY school. This influenced the types of questions that were asked in the interviews. For example, questions were designed to explore the impact that AIFY supports had on students lives (see Appendix B). In comparison, if the study was designed with my research question in mind, participants would have been asked questions based on what we wanted to know about their relationships with adults in their school. As well, we could have purposefully selected students who accessed both teachers and success coaches, thereby allowing us to make more direct comparisons and conclusions about what makes the AIFY supports unique.

While the sample size was relatively small (n=6) and interviews varied in length, this is not inherently problematic for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is because the purpose of qualitative research is to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon of interest, not to generalize findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At the time of the interviews, five Edmonton schools had implemented the AIFY initiative. However, all participants in this study were from the same high school. While this limits what this study can say about the AIFY initiative as a whole, it also allows for a more in-depth understanding of one of the AIFY schools. As such, this study may then be best viewed as a case study of one AIFY school.

Future Directions

This study can provide insight to all partners within the AIFY initiative as to how students are experiencing these pivotal relationships within their schools. Future research should continue to explore developmental relationships within the AIFY initiative. As this study shows, there is potential for the relationships in AIFY to be understood as developmental, and as such future studies could explore and compare student's and staff's perspectives of this topic. As well, the developmental relationships framework could be used to measure students' and staffs' relationships to identify the degree to which certain elements are experienced. This would help identify adults' relative strengths and shortcomings and would provide valuable feedback on how to improve and sustain these relationships that have already been built. Resources exist to help adults intentionally build these relationships (Pekel, 2019), which may also be useful to AIFY staff. Additionally, given the AIFY's implementation in K-12 schools, there is potential to explore the lifespan of these relationships, from start to graduation and beyond. In this way, AIFY could contribute to the understanding of how developmental relationships progress. As

suggested earlier, given the promising findings of this study, I would suggest future research explore if and how the principles of wraparound align with the principles of the developmental relationships framework.

Conclusion

This study has found support for recognizing that the meaningful relationships built within the AIFY initiative between students and school staff can be considered developmental relationships. This study has shown that adults build relationships explicitly through how they interact with students and implicitly through creating supportive environments. As well, some adults employ different skills that bolster their relationships with students. In some cases, these relationships even extend beyond students' high school years and are maintained after graduation, thus providing students with healthy relationships to support their transition into young adulthood. This study also contributes more generally to the growing literature on students' experiences of developmental relationships and suggests that wraparound school supports like the AIFY initiative may be important and unique sites for furthering understanding of developmental relationships in education.

References

All in For Youth & Community-University Partnership. (n.d.-a.). All in For Youth: Year 3 evaluation report. https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/media-library/aify-yr3-report.pdf

All in For Youth & Community-University Partnership. (n.d.-b.). All in For Youth: Year 4 evaluation report. https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/research/evaluation/aify_y4_evalreport_2021.pdf

All in For Youth & Community-University Partnership. (n.d.-c.). All in For Youth: Year 5 evaluation report. https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/research/evaluation/cup-aify-year-5-report_final_mar-2022.pdf

Barber, B. K., & Schluterman, J. M. (2008). Connectedness in the lives of children and adolescents: A call for greater conceptual clarity. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 43*(3), 209–216.

Beam, M. R., Chen, C., & Greenberger, E. (2002). The nature of adolescents' relationships with their "very important" nonparental adults. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(2), 305–325.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*. 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. SAGE.

Bruns, E. J., Walker, J. S., & The National Wraparound Initiative Advisory Group. (2008). Ten principles of the wraparound process. In E. J. Bruns & J. S. Walker (Eds.*), The resource guide to wraparound* (pp. 18-22). National Wraparound Initiative.

Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (2010). The flourishing literature on flourishing relationships. Journal of Family Theory & Review, 2(1), 25-35.

Children's Services (2021, December 16). *Child and youth well-being review: Final review.* Government of Alberta

Community University Partnership (n.d.). *All In For Youth: Evaluating a collaborative model of support for children, youth and families in inner-city Edmonton schools.* University of Alberta. https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/research/evaluation/all-in-for-youth.html

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE.

Debicki, A. (2009). WrapAround in Canada. Hamilton, Ontario, Wrap Canada.

Duchnowski, A. J., & Friedman, R. M. (1990). Children's mental health: Challenges for the nineties. *The Journal of Mental Health Administration, 17*(1), 3–12.

Friedman, R. M. (1994). Restructuring of systems to emphasize prevention and family support. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 23*(Supplement), 40-47.

Hill, R. A. (2020). Wraparound: A key component of school-wide culture competence to support academics and socio-emotional well-being. *Peabody Journal of Education, 95*(1), 66–72.

Kenner, B. B., & Raab, E. L. (2021). *The missed opportunity of adolescence: How schools, educators and families can leverage developmental practice to support adolescents to reach their full potential.* Choice-filled Lives Network.

Li, J., & Julian, M. M. (2012). Developmental relationships as the active ingredient: A unifying working hypothesis of "what works" across intervention settings. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82(2), 157–166.

Malysiak, R. (1997) Exploring the theory and paradigm base for wraparound. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 6*, 399–408.

Malysiak, R. (1998). Deciphering the tower of babel: Examining the theory base for wraparound fidelity. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 7*(1), 11–25.

McKay, C., & Macomber. (2021). The importance of relationships in education: Reflections of current educators. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 92*, A126–A127.

McNeely, C., & Falci, C. (2004). School connectedness and the transition into and out of health-risk behavior among adolescents: A comparison of social belonging and teacher support. *Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 284–292.

Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. SAGE Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Pekel, K., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Syvertsen, A. K., & Scales, P. C. (2015). *Don't forget the families: The missing piece in America's effort to help all children succeed*. Search Institute.

Pekel, K., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Syvertsen, A. K., Scales, P. C., Sullivan, T. K., & Sethi, J. (2018). Finding the fluoride. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 88*(5), 493-502.

Resnick, M. D., Harris, L. J., & Blum, R. W. (1993). The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health, 29*, S3–S9.

Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2017). *Relationships first: Creating connections that help young people thrive*. Search Institute.

Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., & Mannes, M. (2006). The contribution to adolescent well-being made by nonfamily adults: An examination of developmental assets as contexts and processes. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*(4), 401–413.

Scales, P. C., Pekel, K., Sethi, J., Chamberlain, R., & Van Boekel, M. (2020). Academic year changes in student-teacher developmental relationships and their linkage to middle and high school students' motivation: A mixed methods Study. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 40*(4), 499–536.

Scales, P. C., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2018). The contribution of nonfamily adults to adolescent well-being. In L. J. Lansford & P. Banati (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent developmental research and its impact on global policy* (pp.150-170). Oxford University Press.

Scriven, M. (2013). Conceptual revolutions in evaluation: Past, present, and future. In M. C., Alkin (Eds.), *Evaluation roots: A wider perspective of theorists' views and influences* (2nd ed., pp. 167-179). SAGE Publications.

Search Institute. (2013). *Developmental relationships: A new strategy for Search Institute and a new emphasis for youth development and education*. https://ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/195_Developmental_Relationships-A_New_Strategy_for_Search_Institute.pdf

Sethi, J., & Scales, P. C. (2020). Developmental relationships and school success: How teachers, parents, and friends affect educational outcomes and what actions students say matter

most. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 63*. 101904. 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101904

Sieving, R. E., McRee, A.-L., McMorris, B. J., Shlafer, R. J., Gower, A. L., Beckman, K. J., Doty, J. L., Plowman, S. L., Resnick, M. D., & Kapa, H. M. (2017). Youth–adult connectedness: A key protective factor for adolescent health. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 52*(3), S275–S278.

United Way (n.d.-a.). *All in for youth*. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from https://www.myunitedway.ca/allinforyouth/

United Way (n.d.-b.). *All if for youth school tour.* Retrieved August 25, 2022 from https://www.myunitedway.ca/school-tour/

VanDenBerg, J., Bruns, E. J., & Burchard, J. (2008). History of the wraparound process. In E. J. Bruns & J. S. Walker (Eds.), *The resource guide to wraparound* (pp. 35-44). National Wraparound Initiative.

VanDenBerg, J. E., & Mary Grealish, E. (1996). Individualized services and supports through the wraparound process: Philosophy and procedures. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 5*(1), 7–21.

Walker, J. S. (2008). How, and why, does wraparound work: A theory of change. In E. J. Bruns & J. S. Walker (Eds.), *The resource guide to wraparound* (pp. 96-107). National Wraparound Initiative.

Walker, J. S., Bruns, E. J., & The National Wraparound Initiative Advisory Group. (2008). Phases and activities of the wraparound process. In E. J. Bruns & J. S. Walker (Eds.), *The resource guide to wraparound* (pp. 176-189). National Wraparound Initiative.

Appendix A

Code Chart					
Theme	**Code (Shortened name)**	**Definition**	**When to use**	**When not to use**	**Example.**
	Objective Role	What the objective relationship is between the participant and the adult.	Use to identify the adults' position in the school.	Do not use when the student describes what their relationship *felt* like.	Uh, and then my art teacher, I'd have to say was probably my second favorite.
	Subjective Role	How the participant describes their relationship with the adult.	Use if the student identifies their relationship as something other than the adults' objective role in the school. This may also include the student's explanation for why they see the adult this way.	Do not use to describe the adults' objective role within the school.	Well, my favorite was Randy because he's like a father figure to me. Like gave a lot of emotional support *voice wavers* and guidance. He helped me actually get my first real job. And—and before that, he trusted me with like, he asked me to be a school youth leader for summer. We ran, um…the school 'merch store' for a bit together and entrusted me with a lot of those responsibilities.
Focus of Interactions	Academic Support	The adult helped the student with their academic work/life.	Use when the participant describes a specific time when the adult helped them with a subject (broad support) or with a specific task within that subject (specific support).	Do not use if the student is describing their relationship with the adult as a list which includes academic support **and** another type of interaction (Go to Two/Three Dimension relationship)	He was only at the school for a year, but my uh, Grade 11 English teacher—We called him Mr. K because he had a not-Caucasian last name. And so *laughs* everyone just called him Mr. K. But, yeah. Like he, uh…because when [my grandma] passed, it was right around the time of final

					exams. So, he…talked with the principals, and I didn't even have to end up taking my final. And…yeah, he was super nice and supportive throughout uh, it all.
	Emotional Support	The adult provided emotional support to the student.	Use when the participant describes a time/way the adult provided support emotionally when the student had a problem or difficulty in their personal life.	Do not use if the student is describing what made the adult's support valuable. Do not use if the student is describing their relationship with the adult as a list which includes emotional support **and** another type of interaction (Go to Two/Three Dimension relationship)	But yeah, Randy was definitely…uh, anytime my parents were fighting or during [my grandma's passing], or I was going through a breakup, he… helped me through a lot of that.
	Practical Support	The adult helped the student and/or their family in a practical way.	Use when the student describes a time when the adult helped them in a practical way, that was not tied to academics and involved the adult going outside of their objective role. I.e., the adult has gone "above and beyond" their objective role. The support provided is more concrete and "hands on" and may extend beyond the student/adults' relationship into the students family.	Do not use if the support provided relates to academic work. Do not use if the student is describing their relationship with the adult as a list which includes practical support **and** another type of interaction (Go to Two/Three Dimension relationship)	My teacher, Mr. Courie, is still a big influence on me and *my* family personally. [I: Mhmm] Um. Even, like went out of his way to like, show my brother how to, like, ride a bike too. And stuff like that.

	Promoting Growth	The adult provides an opportunity for the student to mature and/or grow their skills and capabilities.	Use when (a) the adult directly provides the student with a specific task that helps them build their skills or develop new skills, or (b) if the adult's demeanour/behaviour indirectly inspires the student to be like them.	Do not use if the student approached the adult with the opportunity/activity. Do not use if the student is describing their relationship with the adult as a list which includes promoting growth **and** another type of interaction (Go to Two/Three Dimension relationship)	One of the years [Randy] asked me to [be a youth leader at the summer camp for the incoming grade]. That was a lot of fun, actually. I ended up just spending, basically all of my time just hanging out with [this kid, Luke]. And getting him to come out of his shell. [His hand was disfigured] and you could tell he was like, self-conscious about it because he was always wearing sweaters and hoodies that would hide it. But like, besides that he told the funniest stories and was just like the quirkiest guy. And it was like, one of my proudest moments when it was just like a bunch of us around a table and he took his sweater off and you could tell that he was comfortable. And also, when we were all outside. We were painting trash cans for the city. And watching him just like paint and get so proud. Like when I was helping him out … doing something that was—it was really, really nice.
	Social Aspect	The student and adult have a social connection and the student enjoys spending time with the adult.	Use when the focus of the interaction is based on a social interaction and/or activity. The student highlights a social and leisure	Do not use if the time together is focused on improving the student's mastery of an academic subject or assignment.	Me teaching Randy how to paint. Just him getting all giddy cause I would have him paint something or draw something beforehand. Before I gave him any tips or any advice. And we'd walk

			component of their relationship with the adult. I.e. enjoyed the company of the adult, liked to talk to the adult, do activities with the adult	Do not use if the student is describing their relationship with the adult as a list which includes a social aspect **and** another type of interaction (Go to Two/Three Dimension relationship)	through it after and seeing his giddy face and the before and after pictures that he made. It was—it was really good.
	Empowering	The student was given power **and/or** was supported in obtaining power, which made them stronger and increased their confidence to make changes to better their life.	Use when the adult worked in partnership with the student [to transfer power from someone else to the student/resolve the problem/issue]	Do not use if the student and adult did not work together to address and resolve the situation. I.e. if the student went to the adult for support, then acted alone to resolve the issue. (See encouraging)	They [adults at my high school] just wanted to help me get the independence I needed for people to respect me. And they did it in a way that was like, very mindful of my safety and my wellbeing.
	Relationship encompasses two dimensions. (Two Dimensions)	The participant and adults' relationship involved **two** separate dimensions of connection or support. Aspects could include: Academic support; Practical support; Emotional support; Promoting growth; a social aspect, etc.	Use when the student names the adult and then lists (presents <u>in short succession</u>) **two** types of interactions that were important in their relationship.	Do not use if the student describes two different times when the adult provided the <u>same type</u> of support.	Mrs. Perri was really nice. She was just a cool adult to talk to and, uh, she really helped me with my art and All that kind of stuff. (Social aspect & Academic support)
	Relationship encompasses three dimensions. (Three Dimensions)	The participant and adults' relationship involved **three or more** separate dimensions of connection or	Use when the student names the adult and then lists (presents <u>in short succession</u>) **three or more** types of interactions that	Do not use if the student describes three or more different times when the adult provided the <u>same type</u> of support.	[Randy] provided a lot of, uh, opportunities to grow, and just hang out and have fun. And was there when my life was getting like, hard or whatever, outside of school.

		support. Aspects could include: Academic support; Practical support; Emotional support; Promoting growth; a social aspect, etc. Also record the dimensions.	were important in their relationship.		(Promoting growth, Social aspect & Emotional support)
	Continued Relationship	The student and adult continue to keep in contact after the student graduated high school (could be via all types of communication, and in-person)	Use when the student says they are maintaining contact with the adult after graduating high school.	Do not use if the student and adult have not spoken since the student graduated.	Yeah, yeah. We're still in touch. We still, talk occasionally and spend the day—not very often, but.
Adult Characteristics	Dependable	The adult has repeatedly supported the student, and/or the student knows the adult will be available to support and/or help them.	Use when the important part of the data regards the *frequency* of support provided by the adult, not necessarily the *type* of support. E.g., a lot, all the time, anytime, always, etc.	Do not use if the student identifies a <u>single</u> occurrence of support or help.	But um Randy was there a lot for me during [my grandma's passing]. [Randy] just really uh… helped me a lot.
	Emotionally Intelligent	The adult is in-tune with their emotions and/or the students' emotions and provides an appropriate response to the situation.	Use when the student indicates that the adult's ability to be in-tune was helpful	Do not use as a replacement for emotional support. This code regards the *process* of providing the correct support/response, not the product of *being* supportive.	Randy just knows, like, never when to overstep. Right? Like, he knew when you just needed a shoulder to cry on, or he knew when you needed, *sniffs* like words of wisdom or advice. But he knew—he always seemed to know when to…you know, give that

					and…yeah. So. He just really … helped me a lot.
	Encouraging	The student either (a) pursued something that was important to them, (b) pursued something new, or (c) took a (positive) risk *because* of the encouragement from the adult.	Use when (a) it was <u>because of</u> the adult's words/actions that the student pursued and/or participated in the activity/behaviour, or (b) it was <u>because of</u> the adult's words/actions the student pursued the activity in a new (risky) way; or (c) it was <u>because of</u> the adult's words/action the student continued in a challenging task and did not give up.	Do not use: If the adult merely supported the activity. I.e., the student would have pursued the same activity in the same way <u>even if</u> they did not receive the support of the adult.	Yeah, like my mom has trusted me to my own devices ever since I was in Grade 5. So yeah. I've been pretty—I guess like my art teacher and Randy, pushing me to um…because for my art AP portfolio, I decided to go do all of my pieces digitally, which usually, I don't know if it's ever—it probably has been done before, but it's not very common because a lot of schools value traditional 'paint on the paper' or you know, type art over digital. I still was accepted into university with that portfolio. Yeah, like them pushing me to pursue that I guess. But besides that you know, I was pretty independent with my schoolwork and stuff, so.
Fostering supportive environments (The Breakfast Club)	Initial Draw	What initially brought the student into the classroom/program.	The student says why they went to the room/program the first time.	Do not use to record reasons why they went the following times.	I usually didn't bring lunches for myself] And then my one friend [said], 'Hey, there's this room, and they give you free food.' And I'm like, 'I'm not just gonna walk into a random room and get free food.' But she dragged me to the room anyways.
	Enabling connections	When an environment/program is intentionally setup	The student identifies they were able to make friends in the	Do not use if the connection referenced is between a specific	My friend group from Grade 9, kind of disintegrated a little bit. Every day at lunch I was

		in a way where students are supported in making friends with one another or that encourages conversations between adults and students.	environment/program and/or interact with adults in the school.	student and specific adult (see Social Aspect)	just sitting at my locker by myself. And sometimes I would have a friend stop by and we would chat. But it was basically me by myself every lunch. [One day my friend dragged me to this room and inside] they were all playing card games and stuff. I [know] this card game [that] no one's ever heard of or played before. I really enjoy teaching it to people and having, like, *chuckles* people to play this card game with. I taught everyone that card game and I was just a part of that room for the next three years. *chuckles*
	Variety of activities	There are multiple tools that students can use to connection with other students.	Use when the student identifies what activities were provided to bond with other students.	Do not use if the student is in a mentor role and engages in an activity with a mentee.	[There were] card games, there'd be Xbox. And there's like, so many different board games that anyone could pull out at any time to play.
	No pressure	Students are accepted as they are.	Use when the student indicates there were no expectations for them to engage in a specific way or to a certain extent.		I went there for a few days *chuckles* kind of like, standing back and watching them because I didn't have the confidence to insert myself. And then when the bell rang and everyone was leaving, I asked Randy if I could teach everyone a card game. [He said, "Yes'] And then I taught the next time that people went there.
	Adaptable/ Accommodating	The environment/program	Use if the environment/program had		[The first year] maybe…20 total [students were there]?

		is adaptable to the needs of the students.	to change to accommodate the needs of new/existing students.		Like, it was kind of divided. Some at the tables some at the Xbox little area. And then it started getting more popular as time went on. And then [the second year] we upgraded to a bigger room upstairs. And then the room was usually always filled at lunch. We used to do a head count every day. I think like…at least 30 to 40 kids, every lunch. Yeah it was a lot of people.
	Belonging	The environment provides a sense of belonging to the student.	Use when the student indicates the environment/program made them feel like they belonged or had a place in the school.		I think just knowing that I had a *place* in school that I could—like cause I'm still super shy [and] kind of reserved person in new areas. But knowing that I had…like a spot and a person in school that I could always fall back on, like, I wasn't afraid to come out of my shell either a little quicker or like, right off the bat. I found that really helpful.
	Safe Space	The environment provided a sense of safety for the student.	Use when the student indicates the environment/program was (a) a safe place for them, (b) made them feel cared for, or (c) was a place for grounding the student.	Do not use if an adult, instead of the environment, provided the student with a sense of safety.	
	Team Communication	Adults within the school work together as a team and communicate to help	Use when the student identifies that adults within the school talked with each other to help solve problems as a team.	Do not use if the student played a role in communicating with the adults.	I felt like [the staff at my high school] all communicated within each other, which I thought was a good thing.

		meet the needs of students.			

Appendix B

AIFY Alumni Student Interview Guide

Hello, my name is _____, and I am a researcher from the University of Alberta. We are doing a project to learn how your schools and their supports affect you and your family. Hearing from you is so important because you are the only one who can tell us what it's like at your school and if you and your family are getting the support you need from your school. If you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to answer questions about yourself, your family, and your school. You can skip any questions that you don't want to answer, and we will not tell anyone your name or any information that could identify you. Your parent/guardian gave us permission to talk to you today, but you get to decide whether you want to talk to us or not. You do not have to take part in this project if you don't want to. You can also agree to join now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us that you don't want to be part of the project anymore. It is completely ok if you don't want to be part of the project, or if you agree to talk to us and change your mind later.

- *Do you have any questions about the project?*
- *Would you like to be a part of the project? (If yes, continue; If no, end the interview)*
- *Is it okay if we record this conversation?*
- *Okay, to start, how old are you and (if applicable) what grade are you in?*
- *How long did you attend your previous school (since what grade)?*

First off, we want to hear about your experiences in your previous school and about the relationships you had with the adults who work there

1. **How would you describe your previous school? What were some things you really liked about that school?**
    a. Classes you liked?
    b. Programs you liked?
    c. People you liked?

2. **Still thinking about your school, who were the adults you liked most at your school?**
    a. Why did you like them?
    b. How did these adults help you in your life?
    c. Are there any other adults who worked in the school that helped you? How did they help you?

3. **What are some of the ways these adults have helped you with your academics (e.g., helped with school work)?**
    a. Helped with reading?
    b. Helped with attendance?
    c. Helped with homework?
    d. Helped to improve grades?

4. **Other than your academics, what are some of the ways these adults have helped you in your life?**
    a. Helped with relationships with family members (e.g., parents, siblings)?
    b. Helped get family support needed (e.g., transportation, food support, etc.)?
    c. Helped connected you to extracurricular activities (volunteering, sports, after-school programs)?

5. **How would your life be different if you did not get to see those adults?**
    a. Academically, would there be any changes to your study habits, grades, or attendance? Why?
    b. How would your personal life be different? (i.e. decreased access to mental health supports, fewer caring adults, basic needs not being fulfilled)

Now we want to ask you a couple of questions about yourself…

6. **Thinking about your experiences at your previous school, is there anything or anyone who has had a lasting impact on your life or your family?**
    a. What is your favourite memory from your previous school and why?
    b. Did you learn something different there that you find useful today?
    c. What has helped you get to where you are today?

7. **Thinking about yourself this past year, what are some good things that happened in your life?**
    a. Learned new things? Made new friends? Tried a new activity? Volunteered somewhere? Won an award? Etc.
    b. Why do you think these good things happened? What made them possible?
    c. Did anyone in your life help make these good things happen?

We just have one more question before we end the interview…

8. **Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your school, how it supports you and/or your family, or about the adults who work in your school?**

Thank you again for talking with us today. Your opinions and perspectives on how you feel about your previous school are very important to us. This helps us get a better understanding of ways your school is or is not supporting the students and families that are part of the school communities.