

*An exploration of the concept of resilience in one National Citizen Service (NCS)
through the experiences of four young people.*

BA (Hons) Education

KV601 Dissertation

An exploration of the concept of resilience in
one National Citizen Service (NCS) through the
experiences of four young people.

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Abstract

This small-scale research explores the concept of resilience in one National Citizen Service (NCS) through the experiences of four young people. NCS is the current coalition's flag ship policy for 15-17 year olds, as part of the Big Society, with aims of developing an increasingly cohesive society (Cabinet Office, 2013). A qualitative research approach encompassed four semi-structured interviews informing a focus group. Data was analysed through staged thematic analysis to reveal meanings assigned to phenomena in order to address the research aims of; gaining an understanding of what constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS, seeking young people's perspectives on how one NCS organisation attempts to develop resilience and finally, identifying potential outcomes. A picture was built providing insight into the operationalised philosophy of the concept of resilience at NCS. The themes of increased confidence and self-esteem, belonging to a diverse community, and new opportunities and experiences emerged to demonstrate participants' views on attempts to develop resilience at NCS. Additionally, findings indicated sustained resilience development among three of the young people and provided focus for future research through the illumination of an issue regarding disadvantaged young people being able to fully access NCS.

Abbreviations

BERA – British Educational Research Association

DfE - Department for Education

FSM - Free School Meals

NCS - National Citizen Service

UK - United Kingdom

Chapter 1 - Introduction

NCS is part of government policy for inspiring individuals aged 15-17 to be more confident and self-aware, with a view to developing a more engaged, cohesive society (Booth et al, 2014). It is a flagship initiative in support of the Big Society, with aims of providing young people with the skills required to become responsible citizens (Cabinet Office, 2013). NCS is operational out of school term time, over five phases. The phases comprise team induction events, away and local residential weeks, designing and delivering a social action project and finally, graduation (NCS, 2015). Despite publicised success, the initiative is not free from criticism (Hillier, 2014). Due to NCS being relatively new, there appears to be limited literature exploring young people's perceptions of the programme. Although developing resilience has been an aim of NCS since its introduction in 2011, it was established as a measure to their annual evaluation report last year (Booth et al, 2014). In order to enhance understanding, intentions of the research were to undertake an exploration of the problematic nature of resilience and the apparent lack of young people's perceptions on the attempts of NCS to develop resilience, asking the questions:

- **What constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS?**
- **What are young people's perspectives on how NCS attempts to develop resilience?**
- **What are the outcomes of this?**

Research questions were initiated through interest, concern and unanswered questions; generated through being a previous employee of NCS and conducting prior research on the notion of resilience in young people. Questions were shaped by actively constructing knowledge through analysing related literature and reflecting on my experience as a former employee (Silverman, 2013). The NCS aim to develop resilience is positioned within a framework of reflection (Catch22, 2014). This captured my attention due to reflection being an area of interest and a strength of

mine. I intend to seek further understanding of reflection, resilience and educational inequality by undertaking postgraduate study and becoming an educational researcher and university lecturer. By doing so, I hope to inform and inspire by encouraging critical reflection and as a result, potentially inform political and educational change.

This piece of research was undertaken with four young people who have participated in one NCS organisation, located in East Sussex over summer 2014, using qualitative data collection techniques. Research aims were to:

- **Gain an understanding of what constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS**
- **Seek young people's perspectives on how NCS attempts to develop resilience**
- **Identify outcomes**

The contested concept of resilience is debated, as are the Big Society and NCS as part of key literature that informs the research. Arguments draw upon understandings derived from BA (Hons) Education modules such as Critical Perspectives on Inequality in Education and Theories of Learning and Development, alongside understandings from experience of working in educational settings. An evaluation of chosen research techniques illuminate the position of the research within an interpretivist paradigm and detail the use of semi-structured interviews informing a focus group. Ethical considerations permeate the study and are discussed and evidenced in the form of reflective journal entries which support validity of data.

Analysis of findings indicate positive perspectives from each of the young people on attempts to develop resilience at NCS. Predominant themes of increased confidence and self-esteem, being part of a diverse community and new opportunities and experiences emerged from the data. Although findings revealed a broader theme comparing NCS with school, due to the research being small-scale the focus remains on how attempts to develop resilience are perceived by four young people from one

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NCS organisation. The emergence of this theme has prompted thought for further research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The literature review is focused upon critical engagement with the problematic nature of resilience and the context and structure of NCS as part of the Big Society.

Resilience

During the last decade the concept of resilience has seen increased prevalence within UK politics and media, and has been highlighted as an area of policy that attracts significant funding (Masten, 2011). The propagation of resilience coincided with an economic recession and saw a shift in the concepts' position from environmental development and health, to diverse fields of policy such as education, poverty reduction and citizenship (Diprose, 2015). The concept is suggested by Glover (2009) to be used interchangeably by government and the media, with notions of well-being and positive mental health. The problematic nature of resilience is evidenced by a lack of consensus regarding an operational definition (Herrman, 2011). However, a consensus of key concepts and related fields of evidence are suggested to have emerged despite continuing controversies (O'Dougherty-Wright et al, 2013).

Resilience may be deemed tautological as it carries varied meanings (MacKinnon, 2013). In spite of this, significant pragmatic value is placed on the concept due to its proposed impact on the lives of young people (Hart et al, 2007). A systematic review of resilience found the notion to be essential to the understanding and encouragement of positive youth development, arguably demonstrating the importance of this research (Brownlee et al, 2013). Historically, definitions of resilience emphasised personal traits and were suggested to reject environmental factors (Ungar, 2004). More modern approaches argue that resilience is context specific and not a dichotomous characteristic possessed by individuals (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 1997; Ungar, 2013). Norman (2000) supports the view that resilience can be a product of interaction among personal and environmental factors, highlighting a combination of

intrinsic and extrinsic influences (Roisman and Padron et al, 2002). The central notion of resilience is suggested to be the capacity to adapt and thrive, irrespective of potential challenges (Donnon and Hammond 2007). The concept's significance is highlighted in an ever globalised world (Ungar, 2015).

Resilience in schools

The significance of resilience development among young people can be seen by its prominence in international schooling (Dewhurst et al, 2014). In New Zealand, resilience development is part of the national secondary school curriculum (Curtis, 2014). Similarly, in Hong Kong high schools, resilience lessons focus on social competence, emotional literacy, self-control and positive peer relations (Brownlee et al, 2013). However, these lessons have recently been introduced and consequently, there is no research detailing their impact (ibid). The UK Resilience Programme (2007) draws upon overseas resilience initiatives and aims to address increasing concerns around the behaviour of young people in schools. It was piloted in 2008 across three local authorities and deemed successful by the DfE (Challen et al, 2009). However, the programme remains optional for schools and is not part of the national curriculum, despite recommendations that schools are central institutions for resilience development (Challen et al, 2014; Public Health England; 2014). Consequently, there are growing calls in support of Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt's view that schools need to promote resilience and character (Garner, 2015).

Evaluating Interventions

The Pathways to Resilience Research Program was a five-country (China, Canada, South Africa, Colombia and New Zealand) research programme of resilience development in schools, which produced recommendations based on its findings (Dewhurst et al, 2014). However, the Systematic Review of Resilience Outcome

Literature Relevant to Children and Adolescents (2013) found comparing previous international resilience research challenging due to its ambiguous and contextual nature. The lack of clarity in resilience research is evidenced by a relative absence of specific assessment measures (Hjemdal, 2012). The apparent lack of distinct indicators arguably impedes the ability to measure effectiveness of resilience-promoting interventions (The Children's Charity, 2007). Different studies use different measures and therefore outcomes may be inconsistent and lack validity (Hjemdal, 2012). Despite these limitations there appears to be some consensus of recommendations for developing resilience among young people (Hart et al, 2007).

Potential strategies to develop resilience

Ginsburg's (2012) Essential Building Blocks of Resilience states that to develop resilience, young people require; opportunities to develop important skills to feel competent and demonstrate such competence in order to gain confidence; positive connections with family, friends and the community; a sense of right and wrong and a commitment to integrity; opportunities to contribute to the well-being of others; a range of coping strategies and a sense of control (Ginsburg, 2012). Hart et al's (2007) Resilient Therapy holds some similarities with Ginsburg's (2012) approach and draws upon Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). Resilient Therapy incorporates aspects suggested to be fundamental to resilience development (Aumann and Hart, 2009). These include being safe and healthy, having a sense of belonging, learning, coping and being confident (Hart et al, 2007). Resembling Maslow's (1943) approach to self-actualisation, each level of need should be met before progressing to the next. A study by Jovchelovitch and Concha (2013) indicated increased rates of success where levels of need are addressed progressively. However, the hierarchy of needs, and subsequently Resilient Therapy, can be criticised for their inability to be objectively measured and their absence of supporting empirical evidence (Smith, 1999). More specifically, Newman (2004) suggests strategies to develop resilience

among 15-19 year olds, including strong social support networks, participation in a range of activities and having opportunities to help others. Bell (2001) also suggests that developing and expanding community partnerships promotes resilience among young people aged 15-19 years.

Potential negative connotations of resilience

Young people who thrive in spite of challenges can be identified as being resilient and possessing particular strengths (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). This raises questions around young people who are not classed as resilient. Diprose (2015) argues that communities and individuals who are labelled resilient are obligated to suffer disadvantage. Despite the increased prevalence of resilience by policy-makers, the onus appears to be placed on the individual to overcome the socio-political structures underpinning their existence (Curtis, 2014). In this context, resilience may be suggested to resonate as a means of surviving society, rather than contributing to the shaping of society, which could be seen to detract from the needs of the vulnerable (Diprose, 2015). Friedli (2012) argues that the focus on resilience may serve as a distraction from the analysis of social structures, which are suggested to contribute to the maintenance of inequality through sustaining the dominant culture. From this approach, resilience is arguably a consolation for the absence of social change and could be seen to be damaging due to its potential over-use (Diprose, 2015). Leading resilience researcher Michael Ungar (2008) has hailed a focus on movement away from individual change towards social justice, as fundamental to the successful development of resilience among young people.

The Big Society, NCS and resilience

The Big Society can be described as a philosophy drawn from the ideals of progressive conservatism (Mycock and Tonge, 2011). Such a philosophy was introduced in an attempt to address the challenges of economic and social decline and progress towards an engaged society (Norman, 2010). The riots of 2011 were suggested by David Cameron (2011) to consist of young people with no purpose or shape to their lives. National debate appeared to attribute the riots to young people with a lack of resilience and respect (Diprose, 2015). Cameron (2011) claimed there was a national need to restore values and so established NCS (Williams, 2011). This approach potentially highlights a concern of the focus on resilience in policy being concentrated on criminal justice, not social justice (Curtis, 2014). Alternatively, Australia has seen a shift in approach of resilience development among young people, from aiming to prevent unacceptable behaviour to a broader approach encompassing strengths and assets of young people (Resilient Youth Australia, 2014). It appears that this approach is having a significant influence on the attitudes of the young people and has been noted to be an effective strategy for reducing anti-social behaviour by the Australian government (2014). However, it could be argued to be in the best interests of the Australian government to promote positive effects of the approach, as similarly to NCS, the initiative was introduced by the government.

NCS in Practice

In order to change attitudes and develop resilience in young people, the approach of NCS is entrenched within a framework of reflection (Catch22, 2014). Reflection is timetabled into each day of the five-stage programme. During residential weeks, the programme provides active, meaningful activities from 8am until 9:30pm, consisting of team-building and problem solving tasks, personal, social and emotional workshops, physical and creative activities and domestic duties, among others (ibid). Reflection

can be noted to inform appropriate choices (The Children's Charity, 2007). Therefore, NCS attempts to provide opportunities to encourage young people to make choices and learn from their mistakes (NCS, 2015). Such independence is arguably stifled within schools and is suggested to be most successfully enhanced outside of school environments (Meyer et al, 2008). The UK government focus appears to have seen a shift from Labour's aims to develop resilience in schools to a Conservative approach of placing responsibility with the private sector, who deliver NCS (Boffey, 2012).

Previous Research

NCS and the Big Society are highly contested concepts (Macmillian, 2013). The final civil exchange audit of the Big Society is argued to have demonstrated the philosophy's decline and failure to achieve its aims (Butler, 2015). NCS was introduced to address social, economic and moral issues, suggested to concern particular sections of young people in British society (Mycock and Tonge, 2011). The value of NCS is proposed to be uncertain due to a lack of evidence of its influence on the attitudes and behaviour of young people (Hillier, 2014). This arguably highlights the significance of this research seeking participant perspectives. Conservative commissioned NCS research raised uncertainties of the initiative's effectiveness in achieving its aims, particularly with regard to those from deprived backgrounds (Mycock, 2010).

A main principle of NCS is to promote social diversity; however, concerns have been raised that middle-class young people are disproportionately represented (ibid).

Despite the claim that resilience development among disadvantaged young people sees increased success compared with middle-class participants (Morrell et al, 2013).

In response, the chairman of NCS has claimed that the number of young people participating in NCS who receive FSM* is equivalent to the general school population (Merz, 2014). This, however, does not account for the significant number of young

*Measure for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kounali et al, 2009).

people whose parents do not apply, yet are entitled to FSM (DfE, 2012). Previous NCS research raises questions of whether it is those young people who are already confident and resilient who are signing up for NCS and if those whom the initiative is primarily aimed at, lack the motivation to join their counter-parts (Mycock, 2010). The findings from the 2012 evaluation of NCS state that the attitudes and behaviour of those who sign up could be pronounced as significantly pro-social, as opposed to anti-social, in comparison with the general population of 15-17 year-olds (Morrell et al, 2013).

The annual NCS evaluations indicate that 75% of participants in England feel that their resilience improved on NCS. However, the evaluations do not attempt to measure perceived improvements of resilience, as there is no comment on participant's resilience prior to undertaking NCS (Morrell et al, 2013). Discovering this informed the choice of data collection techniques for the research and shaped interview and focus group questions (Burns and Sinfield, 2012). Despite developing resilience being incorporated into a main principle of NCS since 2011, it was introduced as a measure of analysis in the 2013 annual evaluation (Booth et al, 2014). This highlights a need for research to explore the concept of resilience within NCS. Hillier (2014) appears to identify omissions from the cabinet office commissioned annual evaluations, implying there is little place for negativity in the reports. As with previous resilience research, validity of the evaluations is impacted by the contested nature of resilience and differing methods of measurement (Hjemdal, 2012).

The significance of the apparent absence of a definition of resilience within the NCS evaluations may also impact the validity of the report's findings. The Strategic National Framework on Resilience (2010) provides a government definition as an individual's ability to be adaptable and maintain satisfactory function and identity. Critics could argue that the emphasis on the individual to be resilient relocates responsibility from the state and overlooks the needs of the vulnerable (Curtis, 2014). Similarly to the

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Dutch model for national citizenship, perhaps citizenship programmes in the UK should aim to inspire young people to challenge social adversity alongside modifying their own attitudes (Hart and Gagnon, 2014).

Reviewing relevant literature has informed the research whilst further establishing my position (Burns and Sinfield, 2012). In order to maintain reflexivity I have remained aware of the influence of an informed view, detailed within my reflective learning journal to monitor any impact on the research (Flyvbjerg, 2001), (Appendix 10a). The literature highlights concepts which are complex to define and measure, raising concerns of intervention evaluations (Damon, 2004). This highlights a requirement for young people's perceptions in order to gain a deeper insight of how resilience can be developed (Luthar, 1999).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The issue of investigating the social world can take on a number of approaches (Ritchie et al, 2014). Research frameworks may be observed to be along a spectrum of approaches which address a number of philosophical questions. The spectrum of research approaches intertwine the purpose and significance of the research and are dependent on relational components comprising ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods (Bartlett et al, 2001). These components are based around Crotty's (1998) four element design and are adapted to include the study of being to explain perceptions of reality and its nature (Gruber, 1993).

Justification and analysis of the chosen research strategy demonstrates critical understanding of ethical implications. Selections were influenced by my personal values and competency. Consequently, it was imperative for me to maintain reflexivity and transparency around my own influence on the research (Greenbank, 2003). The relationship between the research and my own opinions has been recognised, as understandings were created within the progression of the enquiry, through the practice of reflection (Cohen et al, 2011).

Philosophical assumptions

Ontology makes assumptions regarding the social reality being investigated and is therefore related to the epistemological assumption of how knowledge of this social reality may be obtained (Blaikie, 2007). Ontology and epistemology are key components to the differentiation of theoretical perspectives yet hold a logical and directional relationship of synthesising to formulate approaches (Grix, 2002). My ontological position was of a relativist due to establishing understandings and meanings through experience held by individuals, which were intersubjectively woven to construct reality (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Consequently, there is no collective social reality and therefore relativism is argued to impede the potential to identify

truths via empirical means (Scott and Usher, 1996). Epistemology is related to the study of knowledge and justified belief (Crotty, 2003). Rather than attempting to discover a truth, my research aimed to advance understanding through social interaction (Blaxter and Hughes, 2006). Therefore my epistemological position was of a constructivist as social interaction constructs knowledge. Knowledge is not received passively by the individual, but actively created (Heylighen, 1997). A constructivist epistemological approach is argued to develop comprehension of resilience research among young people (Ungar, 2004). Alternatively, objectivism was discarded on the basis that the purpose of the research was not to test hypotheses (Gray, 2014). Epistemology is inherent within the theoretical perspective as it provides the philosophical stance for viewing and understanding of the world (Crotty, 2003).

Theoretical perspective

The research reflects my stance from an interpretivist theoretical perspective as multiple realities are distinctly relative to individuals (Cohen et al, 2011). Therefore, the chosen theoretical perspective rejects the positivist assumption of a singular reality (Crotty, 2003). The interpretivist approach seeks historically positioned and culturally derived interpretations of the social world (ibid). This influenced the approach of the research to endeavour to access meanings assigned to social situations in order to ascertain a deeper understanding of developing resilience among young people at NCS (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Such construction of understanding, illuminated through participant perceptions, is concerned with experiences of individuals within a setting (Lester, 1999). Interpretivism allows for the depiction of subjective meaning via dialogical processes which is appropriate to the research and the methods employed (Arthur et al, 2012). The theoretical perspective, or philosophical stance, provides structure to the methodology and consequently informs the rationality and context behind the research (Crotty, 2003).

Methodology

The research reflects a qualitative methodology as it is noted to allow a holistic view of phenomena (Bartlett et al, 2001). Aims of the research centred on exploring perceptions, therefore data derived from qualitative methodology encompassing description and emphasis, was deemed suitable (Arthur et al, 2012). Due to this, a qualitative approach dominates the study of resilience within social and health sciences (Liebenberg and Ungar, 2009). Alternatively, undertaking a quantitative approach may have proved disingenuous due to the enigmatic nature of resilience and therefore was felt to be unsuitable for this small-scale study (Herrman, 2011). The methodology facilitated the opportunity to discover young people's perceptions through the use of research tools.

Methods

Sampling

A sample size of four young people, two male and two female, was selected as a large enough sample to ensure reliability of data, whilst acknowledging the limitation of the study being small-scale (Cohen et al, 2011). The research makes no attempt to generalise findings and therefore a non-probability sample was appropriate (O'Leary, 2010). Due to a restricted timeframe a snowball method of sampling was undertaken (Cohen et al, 2011). Two participants expressed their interest in the research, they in turn, identified two further participants who expressed interest (ibid). This is not a random method and holds the potential for bias, as participants may have held similar experiences and characteristics through knowing one another (Merriam, 1998). However, as an interpretivist researcher, such limitations were considered in order to reduce potential bias (Maxwell, 2009).

The literature presents the debate of middle-class young people being disproportionately represented within NCS (Mycock, 2010). Therefore it is significant

to note that three of the four participants did not receive FSM at school. This may be a limitation to the research as the sample does not reflect an equal perspective of young people who have been classed as disadvantaged. Participants' socio-economic background became significant to the study after data had been collected. Therefore, participants were contacted to provide their consent for use of their FSM status within the research (Appendix 1).

Semi-structured interviews

It is recommended that research positioned within an interpretivist perspective should embark on a holistic approach to data, compared to an edited insight (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The research sought to gain understanding through the young people's perceptions and therefore the initial method was semi-structured interviews, shaped by the methodology (Crotty, 2003). Semi-structured interviews, conducted in a setting selected as convenient for participants, provided freedom for the context of dialogue, as social interaction was valued (Kvale, 1996). In acknowledgment of the method's limitations, interviews were not standardised however participants were made aware of proposed questions in order to maintain consistency (Appendix 2). Questions were informed by the literature and understandings from previously being employed with NCS, with research aims in mind. As a previous employee undertaking reflective practice, I endeavoured to maintain awareness of my influence on the research (Resnik, 2011). A reflective journal assisted in ensuring reflexivity whilst detailing my own interpretation of events (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Piloting interview questions early in the research process contributed to reflexivity and may have assisted in addressing potential challenges in the latter stages of research (King and Horrocks, 2012), (Appendix 10b). The interview schedule was distributed to participants four days prior to them taking place. This contributed to reliability and allowed participants to comment in advance of recorded interviews (King and

Horrocks, 2012). Prior to interviews commencing, definitions of resilience were discussed with participants, despite Cohen et al (2011) claiming that prior discussion can influence the data. The initial interviewee expressed her wishes to discuss definitions and I felt this would provide an opportunity for each of the participants to reflect on meanings which best related to them. Each of the interviews lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. Open-ended questions allowed for an understanding of participant's lived experience and an opportunity to obtain data that was "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). Although there is no perfect measure, this method enabled me to structure the backgrounds of the young people into questioning to encourage quality data and a more informed view (Drever, 2003). Data derived from interviews raised further questions to inform the focus group.

Focus Group

Contributing to validity by allowing for multiplicity of perspective, a focus group was conducted to filter and build upon data already obtained, through the young people's interaction (Cohen et al, 2011). This method was appropriate to the research as each of the participants had shared the experience of taking part in one NCS organisation during summer 2014 (Moriarty, 2011). Focus groups are suggested to encompass spontaneity through interactions to generate data, however to provide some structure, proposed questions were distributed to participants in advance (King and Horrocks, 2012), (Appendix 3). In order to gain an understanding of participant's perceptions on their resilience development at NCS, a coaching approach provided a reflective visual representation of how resilient they felt before and after NCS (GTCS, 2014), (Appendix 4). The use of such an approach raised caution around predisposing respondents towards identifying progress, as a potential limitation.

Research techniques were employed in this order to eliminate each other's influence and enhance quality data. Prior to undertaking the focus group, concerns of identifying

participants from audio-recording and clarity of data prompted me to carry out a pilot. This proved beneficial by providing me with experience and potentially enhancing quality of data during the official focus group (Walford, 2001). The focus group lasted twenty five minutes and was recorded by Dictaphone, as were the interviews. Once transcribed, member checking was undertaken to revise and review in order to increase validity of the research (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Upon analysing the data, the context was examined by relating data from each of the methods, in order to aid interpretation and illuminate a richer picture of events (Silverman, 2013). Synthesis of methods is proposed to enhance rigour as data has been filtered to focus the research (Denzin, 2012).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis facilitated the depiction and categorisation of themes from data to reflect research questions (Ritchie et al, 2014). Aiming to make meaning from rich, thick data, reoccurring patterns were coded under staged progression to provide structure (Boyatzis, 1998) (Appendix 5a). The codes were reviewed to enrich quality, and underwent analysis to illuminate areas of discrepancy and convergence and salience of themes (Hartas, 2010) (Appendix 5b). The inter-relationship of themes was explored, highlighting expected and unexpected content. A strategy combining inductive and deductive approaches, to allow for pre-determined themes from the literature and the emergence of new themes, was undertaken (Wiling, 2013). In order to maintain reflexivity, I remained aware of predicted themes and vigilant to misinterpreting data (Clayton, 2013). The reality that such analysis is bound by subjective interpretation was acknowledged. Consequently, a stringent iterative process enhanced validity through constant comparison to ensure codes matched original data and research questions.

Ethics

BERA (2012) position ethical considerations as essential to the recognition and promotion of respect and diversity in research. Throughout the process the British Education Association Ethical Guidelines for Research in Education (2012) and the University of Brighton Guidance on Good Practice in Research Ethics and Governance 2014-15 were accredited and reflected upon. Primary ethical concerns were for the privacy, safety and protection of participant's however, I was accountable for safeguarding NCS, myself and the university (Resnik, 2011). An initial research proposal was submitted to ensure it met the standards of the University of Brighton's Ethics Committee (Appendix 6). Throughout the research process, support and input was received from my tutor, with regular meetings to discuss progress and ethical awareness (Appendix 12). Ethics were upheld by planning, reflecting, monitoring and evaluating, alongside additional procedures detailed within the study, for example piloting research techniques. Participants were provided with an information sheet to consider their involvement in the research (Appendix 7). The information sheet outlined research aims and stated options to withdraw from the process at any time without explanation (BERA, 2012).

Participants were over the age of 16 and not considered vulnerable (NSPCC, 2015). Therefore they were able to provide their consent via signing and dating the form issued (Appendix 7). Participants were made aware of potential emotional triggers during the process; highlighting the significance of confidentiality for the research. Anonymity is ensured as far as can be within a small-scale study consisting of semi-structured interviews and a focus group (Cohen et al, 2011). Concerns of anonymity were addressed through the implementation of pseudonyms to protect identities, the omission of location of the NCS organisation and the secure storage and destruction of data, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), (BERA, 2012). Additional action was taken to address ethical concerns, for example, reminding participants of

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confidentiality prior to commencing the focus group (Moriarty, 2011). A previously mentioned ethical concern was that of my former employment with NCS and the impact this would have on the research. The young people taking part in the research were familiar with me as a member of staff (Appendix 8a). Undertaking reflective practice through the form of a research journal is suggested to contribute to maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process and is evidenced in support of data (Cohen et al, 2011).

Chapter 4 - Presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

Analysis of data presented five themes. The focus of analysis of findings is on predominant themes of:

- Understandings of resilience
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Belonging to a diverse community
- New opportunities and experiences

The discussion of findings summarises and synthesises the outcomes of the research.

Introductory Theme – Understandings of resilience

The young people expressed similar understandings of resilience to those of Donnon and Hammond (2007) and Zolkoski and Bullock (2012); to persevere and thrive in spite of potential challenges (Appendix 9a). However, when asked about his understanding of resilience, Jay's response differed. He defined resilience as an individual's ability to "*adapt to whatever situation [they] find [themselves] in and manage.*" echoing the Strategic National Framework on Resilience's (2010) definition. Such focus on the individual to "*manage*" may reflect aims of surviving rather than thriving (Diprose, 2015). Jay's perception differs to Val's understanding of resilience being, "*Not just to survive, but thrive.*" It is significant to the study that Jay can be classed as disadvantaged as he received FSM at school (Kounali et al, 2009). The young people's backgrounds may be seen to influence their responses in this respect (Walker and Donaldson, 2010). Participant's visions of an extremely resilient person were discussed during the focus group and highlighted the potential for such resilient people to be arrogant and lack empathy (Appendix 9b). Regardless of criticism from those in the field, the young people's critical comments in this study arguably support the view of Diprose (2015) and Fredrickson (2009) of the potentially damaging effects

of resilience. Resilient individuals may lack the capacity to experience negative emotions (ibid).

Despite briefly referring to resilience development in schools in the literature, it was not an intention to explore within the research, due to its scalability. However during her interview, Kay commented, “*School developed my brain but not necessarily my mind. NCS helped to develop my emotional resilience.*” This was further explored within the focus group. Val echoes Ball’s (2006) view that aims of education are entrenched with particular targets:

[School is] about being successful but not through personal development, it’s solely about the grades you get...Which I think is really important, but so is developing as a person.

Each of the participants, who attended different schools, expressed a need for balance addressing both academic and personal development in schools. This need may arise from a lack of time and resources, in addition to a shift in responsibility of resilience development among young people from state (schools) to private (NCS) organisations (Boffey, 2012).

Theme 2 – Increased confidence and self-esteem

The coaching approach undertaken during the focus group, details participants’ expressions of how resilient they felt before and after NCS, including how resilient they felt at the time of the focus group to identify prolonged resilience development (Appendix 4). Previous NCS research raised questions of whether it is those young people who are already confident and resilient who are signing up for NCS and if those whom the initiative is primarily aimed at, lack the motivation to join their counterparts (Mycock, 2010). This study could support this view as each of the participants indicated that they felt fairly resilient prior to undertaking NCS. Three participants felt

their resilience had developed during NCS and been sustained six months later (Appendix 8b). Kay reflected on the coaching model:

...since NCS, it isn't like I improved and then stayed the same. I think [NCS] set the ball rolling. I felt much better about myself on NCS and I keep feeling better as time goes by.

Bee spoke of her increased confidence and self-esteem, "*At NCS I felt able to be myself,*" yet she expressed a need for further improvement (Appendix 9c). Jay was the only participant who felt his resilience had not improved. This is significant as it is at odds with findings from the 2013 NCS annual evaluation, which states that disadvantaged young people benefit most from NCS' attempts to develop resilience (Morrell et al, 2013). Jay felt his resilience was high (9) prior to taking part in NCS and his resilience stayed the same throughout the programme (Appendix 4). It is argued that among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, resilience is increasingly prevalent in comparison with those from more privileged backgrounds (Diprose, 2015). This may be due to disadvantaged young people being more vulnerable to experiencing adversity than those from upper-class backgrounds (Maclean, 2004).

Overcoming Challenges

As highlighted in the literature, the capacity to overcome challenges can be seen as central to the notion of resilience (Donnon and Hammond 2007). Kay captured this notion, "*Resilience is being presented with an obstacle and overcoming it, which happened all the time on NCS!*" NCS aims to engage young people in a series of challenging activities to develop confidence and resilience (Catch22, 2014). Kay went on to describe how her confidence grew through overcoming challenges (Appendix 9d). Her sentiments were shared by Bee, who elaborated on the process of overcoming challenges to feel competent and confident at NCS:

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The activities we did were quite hard for me at first. I find change difficult and I assumed everyone would judge me. [The activities] became easier as I realised that I could do them.

This approach to developing resilience is supported by Ginsburg (2012) who claims that intervention should assist young people in developing skills to feel competent and gain confidence. Acquiring a range of coping skills in order to increase confidence and self-esteem is an established recommendation for developing resilience in young people (Hart et al, 2007). Two participants spoke specifically of coping. Bee commented, *“I surprised myself that I did it all because I didn’t think that I could be in a situation like [NCS] and cope perfectly.”* Val elaborated, *“I developed coping mechanisms by doing all of the challenges. I am afraid of heights and I spent quite a lot of time up high!”*

Reflection

During NCS, Val was inspired by a poetry workshop to overcome the challenge of smoking cessation, *“NCS encouraged us to reflect and I found myself asking why I smoked.”* Val’s comments appear to indicate a process of reflection to overcome challenges and develop his resilience. The NCS aim to develop resilience is positioned within a framework of reflection to enable young people to be self-aware (Catch22, 2014). Kay discussed the operationalised philosophy of this framework:

A lot of things we did on NCS were focused on reflection. It encouraged me to see myself as perfectly good enough...I’ve struggled with eating disorders in the past and the feminism session encouraged me to reflect on how I treat my body.

Kay’s explanation provides an example of reflection leading to increased self-esteem and resilience. She concluded the discussion, *“I like everything about myself now which I didn’t before NCS. I think that demonstrates the development of my resilience.”* Jay spoke of reflecting for self-awareness to gain control over exam stress

at college, *“There is so much work to do...I get stressed sometimes but I remind myself to be calm and I know, in myself, I get can get through it.”* Jay’s comments indicate reflection to be significant to his sustained learning from NCS as he has engaged with the practice at college. Continued reflection is proposed to assist individuals in gaining increased control of their own emotions and behaviour (Maclean, 2004). However, Tan (2009) questions the extent to which adolescents are able to reflect due to their stage of brain development. Despite this potential limitation, providing a reflective learning environment at a young age is suggested to nurture critical reflection in adulthood (Brunskill, 2006). Such reflection is said to encourage appropriate actions and choices (The Children’s Charity, 2007).

Choice

Jay, Val and Kay expressed positive feelings for, *“the freedom of choice”* they experienced during NCS. Choice can be described as the ability to make decisions (Maclean, 2004). A study by the Samaritans (2009) on young people’s emotional health, produced recommendations for young people to be able to make choices and establish confidence to feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from them to enhance resilience. Kay reflected on her increased confidence, *“I learnt that it’s not wrong to fail at something and it’s not a weakness if you do something wrong.”* According to Brooks and Goldstein (2002) resilient individuals interpret mistakes and failure as opportunities to learn and progress. Bee’s perception differed to the other participants. She observed the increased confidence of her peer’s through freedom of choice at NCS however; her comments indicated she had not experienced it herself:

Before NCS I was independent anyway. I’m used to having to make choices but my friends whose parents do everything for them definitely found the confidence to make decisions.

Bee’s perception echoes the approach of the Resilient Youth Australia programme (2014) which allows young people to make choices as a step towards independence

and agency. Hart et al (2007) however, raise caution around the theme of choice, which was echoed by Val's comments that during NCS, "*There were no boundaries. We did what we wanted.*" This portrays the feeling of freedom Val experienced yet highlights potential concerns for practice. Ginsburg (2012) emphasises the importance of providing choices with a sense of right and wrong for resilience development in young people.

This sub-theme summarises participant's perceptions on NCS' aim to increase responsibility and independence among young people through providing choice (Catch22, 2014). The sub-themes of choice, reflection and overcoming challenges for increased confidence and self-esteem highlight attempts to develop resilience by NCS and positive outcomes for participants.

Theme 3 – Diverse community

To summarise this theme, during Val's interview he observed, "*The sense of community and social mix of a massively varied group was so inspiring on NCS.*" This is reflective of NCS' aim to encourage young people to mix and build relationships with those from different social backgrounds (Catch22, 2014).

Friendship

Bell (2001) and Newman (2004) suggest friendships and social support networks to be significant to the resilience development of young people aged 15-19 years. Each of the young people interviewed spoke animatedly of forming diverse friendships. However, when asked how the sense of community was encouraged by NCS they felt unsure. Both Jay and Kay referred to a poetry workshop to provide an example of how NCS attempted to develop a sense of community among the diverse range of young people. Jay commented:

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We were thrown in with a bunch of random people and I don't know how but we came out like a family. The poetry workshop really united all of us. It was a special moment we all shared together on NCS.

His sentiments were supported by Kay, who elaborated to exhibit the value she placed on the experience:

The poetry workshop stands out for me...everyone came together and bared their souls. It was incredible and I had never felt like that before. There was no judging, it was the most beautiful experience of my life so far.

Bee also spoke of forming new friendships with ease due to a non-judgmental environment in her interview (Appendix 9e). Being free from judgement is suggested to encourage positive connections among communities and promote individual resilience (Ginsburg, 2012). The data appears to suggest a prolonged impact of the experience of meeting a diverse range of people on NCS, evidenced by Bee, *“At college it is quite hard being with all these new people but I've coped really well because I had such a positive experience of meeting new people on NCS.”* Bee also spoke of attachments with NCS employees, *“I got quite attached to everyone; I even bonded with the staff.”* Likewise, Val highlighted positive relationships with staff (Appendix 9f). As a member of staff with this particular NCS group, consciousness is raised here regarding the potential influence I may have had on the data. However the significance of connectedness, relationships and feelings of belonging in the data speak to the significance of collaboration between the staff and young people on NCS (Mcmahon, 2007). Within the field of resilience development there appears to be a consensus promoting collaboration within a framework of attachment (Herrman, 2011). Flynn et al (2006) found that young people with significant attachments to adults, who collaborate, are increasingly able to overcome adversity. This echoes studies by Bowlby (1973), Stein (2008) and The Children's Charity (2007), who propose practitioners to afford young people with a secure base, from which positive social networks can be built.

Team work

It is thought that young people with a sense of belonging, as indicated by participants in this study, care for their communities, take positive action on behalf of others and become effective team workers (Hart et al, 2007). During her interview, Kay took the opportunity to reflect her appreciation for the sense of community she, and others, felt on NCS:

At graduation everyone was asked what NCS meant to them and everyone gave the same responses. We were so grateful to have been part of it together.

The structure of NCS provides opportunities to form relationships and overcome challenges collaboratively early on in the process, in order to undertake a two week social action project (Catch22, 2014). Each of the participants highlighted team work to be essential to the success of their projects (Appendix 9g). Val's comments revealed his perception on the process, *"The sense of community established in the first 2 weeks meant that when complications arose in the social action project, we were able to overcome them together and move forward."* Bee's comments also suggested team work to be essential to the successful completion of the project:

I found the social action project challenging as there were people who were choosing to participate less than others and it was hard to motivate some people. But we worked through it and made it a success.

Bee's perception indicates the potential development of her resilience through overcoming the challenge of the social action project with her team. The sub-themes of friendship and team work within the overarching theme of belonging to a diverse community highlight attempts to develop resilience by NCS and positive outcomes for participants.

Theme 4 - Opportunities and experiences

A study of adolescent mental health by Mortimer et al (1996) noted a key factor in the resilience development of young people to be opportunities and experiences of mastery, to develop skills to feel competent. Kay seemed to place significant value on the new opportunities and experiences NCS provided her, *“NCS should be compulsory for 15-17 year olds. Not just because it looks good on your CV but because of the experiences and opportunities it gives you.”*

Active participation

The significance of new opportunities and experiences in the data speak to the significance of active participation in purposeful activity for enhanced resilience development. Referring back to Val quitting smoking, he observed:

It helped that NCS was such a massive change to my normal routine and that we were encouraged to take opportunities that we normally wouldn't, just to try. The cigarettes no longer fitted in with what I was doing, or what I wanted to do.

His comments describe a shift in approach to his daily routine prompted by NCS. A ten year study by the Regional Youth Work Unit (2007) found purposeful activity to be significant in shaping young people's lives. The data here reflects the aspirations of David Cameron (2011) to provide purpose and shape to the lives of young people. Each of the participants spoke of active participation in new opportunities and experiences during, and as a result of taking part in NCS (Appendix 9h). The NCS graduate scheme provides participants with prolonged volunteering opportunities, as described by Val who has taken advantage of the opportunity:

Through taking part in NCS I have been exposed to more opportunities. I have presented on behalf of NCS at a local youth fair and I am involved in a project where I visit schools and talk about poetry, which is a great passion of mine, to help the children with their feelings.

Val's comments indicate active participation in opportunities exploring his passions to help others, provided by NCS. Such opportunities are suggested to be essential for the expansion of skills for life and the development of resilience in 15-19 year olds (Ginsburg, 2012; Newman 2004).

Transition to adulthood

When asked why she applied for NCS Kay explained, *"It seemed like the natural step between school and college to become less of a teenager and more of an adult."* NCS aims to offer opportunities and experiences to develop life skills, in order to support transition to adult life and enable young people to purposefully contribute to society (Catch22, 2014). Despite being likened to a military programme of national service by the media (Mycock, 2010), there has been little, other than NCS, in the way of UK youth development programmes for all (Mycock and Tonge, 2011). Employers argue young people lack the skills for adult life, therefore it could be claimed that a growing need to provide opportunities for successful transition to adulthood is required (BBC, 2014; Paton, 2014). Having graduated from NCS, Jay felt that, *"all of the opportunities (NCS) gave me; to live independently, face fears and make choices"* contributed to his transition from adolescence to adulthood. His sentiments were shared by Bee, who elaborated on the effect NCS had on her transition into adult life, *"If I hadn't gone to NCS and gained that confidence, I reckon I would have found the whole lifestyle change of becoming an adult and going to work really daunting."* Despite a lack of research on positive transition to adulthood leading to increased resilience, what studies there are indicate young people with a sense of purpose for their future behave resiliently (Hart et al, 2007). This potentially highlights the value of the sub-theme and reflects David Cameron's (2011) aims of NCS.

The themes of increased confidence and self-esteem, being part of a diverse community and new opportunities and experiences demonstrate 4 young people's

perceptions on the attempts of NCS to develop resilience. Significantly, the data illuminates a need for providing boundaries, alongside freedom and independence, for young people to make informed choices. The study also highlights a concern that the coaching approach, undertaken during the focus group, may have predisposed respondents towards identifying progress. This concern was partially addressed at a point of divergence, when Jay did not indicate increased resilience. It may be significant to note that Jay was the lone participant to be classed as financially disadvantaged. The data here differs to wider, previous research on the effects of NCS, which states that disadvantaged young people respond better to attempts to develop resilience than their peers (Morrell et al, 2013). Although noteworthy, the issues surrounding disadvantaged young people and NCS were not the focus of the research. Yet the subject's prominence has raised further questions and provides a focus for future NCS research. Due to my personal interest and having undertaken previous research with disadvantaged young people, I intend to explore this further in future research.

Each of the participants in the study indicated positive perceptions and prolonged effects of attempts by one NCS organisation to develop resilience, summarised by Bee in the focus group, *"I think NCS helped to develop everyone's resilience, not just mine. I definitely feel a lot of what we got from NCS has stayed with us."* Kay, Val and Jay each nodded in agreement with her comments and recommended all young people in the UK to sign up to their local NCS.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion and critical reflection

Despite being context specific, the exploration of the perspectives of four young people has provided a unique opportunity to understand some of the key concepts involved in developing young people's resilience at NCS. Elements of sub-themes and themes in the research link throughout the data to form inter-relationships. Such inter-relationships have provided glimpses of a rich picture of events of one NCS organisation. Each of the young people spoke of overcoming challenges and undertaking reflection to increase their confidence and self-esteem. The theme of belonging to a diverse community was partially unexpected. Despite notions of belonging and relationships arising in the literature, the prominence of diversity throughout data collection was unexpected. Each of the participants spoke of their appreciation for the opportunity of becoming integrated within such a diverse community, highlighting the value they placed upon the experience. New opportunities and experiences formed the final theme, where great value was also placed by participants, comprising of active participation in purposeful activity and transition to adulthood.

The generalisability of the study is limited due to its size and scale; being conducted with a specific population group from one NCS organisation (Herrman et al, 2011). Therefore, intentions of the research to undertake an exploration of the problematic nature of resilience and a lack of young people's perceptions on NCS' attempts to develop resilience, could not be fully addressed. The data suggests that the operationalised philosophy of resilience, within this particular NCS organisation, differs to its governmental definition and approach of addressing anti-social behaviour. It appears this approach to developing resilience in young people, is grounded in humanist philosophy to community and personal development; much like that of the Resilient Youth Australia programme (2014), which has been noted to be an effective strategy for reducing anti-social behaviour by the Australian Government (2014).

Additionally, focus group discussion contributed to the exploration by highlighting unexpected negative perceptions of resilience. This ignited further thought around the negative connotations of the concept. However, the limitation of a lack of time consequently meant further exploration was not possible.

The problem of a lack of young people's perspectives was not fully addressed due to accessing just four individual views. Retrospectively, the study may have addressed the research problem more effectively by involving more participants. However, the participant's perspectives form a rich picture of events which could potentially inform NCS of strengths and weakness for future practice. Participants volunteered their time and seemed keen to share their views. The nature of the research and subsequent methodology allowed for this to happen. As an interpretivist, initial correspondence with participants raised critical awareness of why the young people were taking part (Appendix 10c). This is a potential limitation as it could be argued that the young people who took part were resilient to volunteer and sought to show their resilience, potentially excluding young people who did not feel resilient, from the research.

Undertaking a larger-scale study of a random sample could provide further insight and address this limitation. Consciousness was raised over my influence, as a previous employee, upon the research. Participants knew me and therefore it could be argued that the young people may have said what they felt I wanted to hear. As an interpretivist researcher I was aware that the possibility could not be eliminated but attempted to enhance validity by appealing for honesty throughout the data collection process (Cohen et al, 2011).

Reflecting on my previous understandings of NCS and evaluating the selected research strategy, an auto-ethnographical methodology would have contributed to identifying how NCS attempts to develop resilience. However, the selected research strategy was well placed to address the problem of a lack of young people's perspectives. Undertaking a focus group, informed by interview data proved effective

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in developing the young people's views. Wider, relevant data was generated but not included within the study due to its restrictive scale. An increasingly inductive approach could have warranted more focused questions, however utilising semi-structured interviews allowed for freedom of discussion and may have contributed to providing genuine data. With the gift of time, discourse analysis could be utilised to explore the language of the young people's comments, to enable deeper interpretations and identify distinctions within expansive themes (Cohen et al, 2011). Despite the study's limitations, the words of the young people who took part speak to the value of the research, along with positive perceptions and prolonged effects of attempts by one NCS organisation to develop resilience.

Undertaking previous research has ignited feelings of discomfort and unease however, throughout this research I found myself to be more accepting of the unsettled process. Although challenging at times, I feel I have worked comfortably, if not enjoyably, with the process of research over the course of the academic year. Such prolonged autonomy has provided me with further confidence in my ability to achieve my career aims of becoming a lecturer and researcher of education.

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Appendix 1 – Request for FSM status

From ▾ aracher@bishopbell.co.uk

To: | +

Cc:

Subject: Further information re research

Calibri ▾ 12 ▾ **B** *I* U         

Dear ,

The literature presents the debate of middle-class young people being disproportionately represented within NCS. I feel this could be significant to my research and am therefore writing to ask for permission to include your socio-economic status within the project.

If you are happy for your status to be referred to, please reply to this email stating whether or not you were eligible for Free School Meals at school.

If you do not wish to provide this information, please ignore this email and be assured that no comment will be made within the research.

Kind regards,

Aimi

Appendix 2 – Proposed Interview Schedule

- **I would like to start by asking why you decided to take part in NCS?**
(Background of young person structured into question)
- **Can you describe how taking part in NCS has made or is making a difference to your life, if at all?**
(Background of young person structured into question). Suggestion: to describe your life before NCS and how it is different now.
- **What is your understanding of the term ‘resilience’?**
(prompts – refer to previous discussion on resilience)
- **How has NCS has helped to develop your resilience? If at all?**

In addition, what are your perceptions of these interventions: *(Probe)*

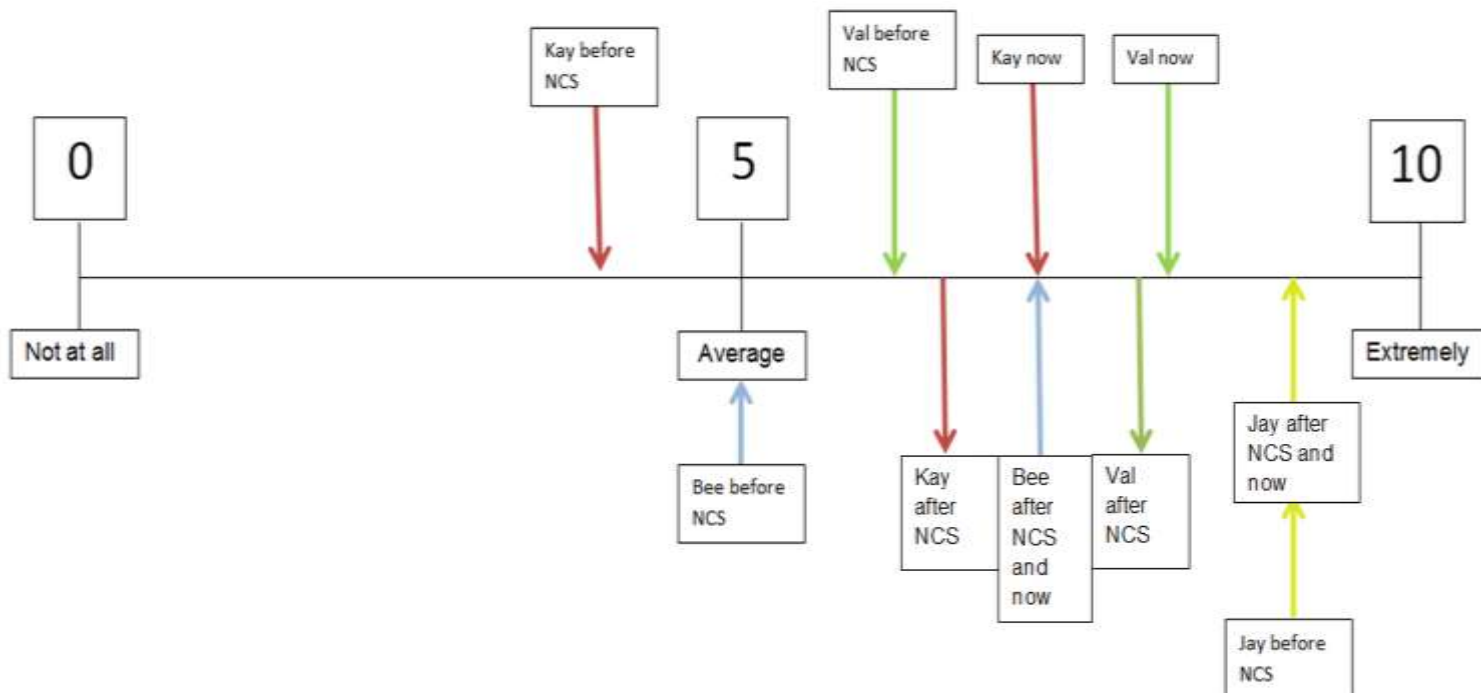
- Guided reflection.
 - Engagement sessions.
 - Social mixing.
 - Home and Away residentials – challenging activities, new experiences, independence, responsibility, problem-solving
 - Social Action projects – pressure, giving back to the community.
 - Acquisition of skills for work and life.
 - Attitude and approach of staff.
 - Health – Food, sport, exercise.
 - Sense of community – sharing, collective, belonging.
 - Preparation for future – moving on, transition, networking.
 - Graduation – sense of pride.
- **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Appendix 3 – Proposed Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group schedule

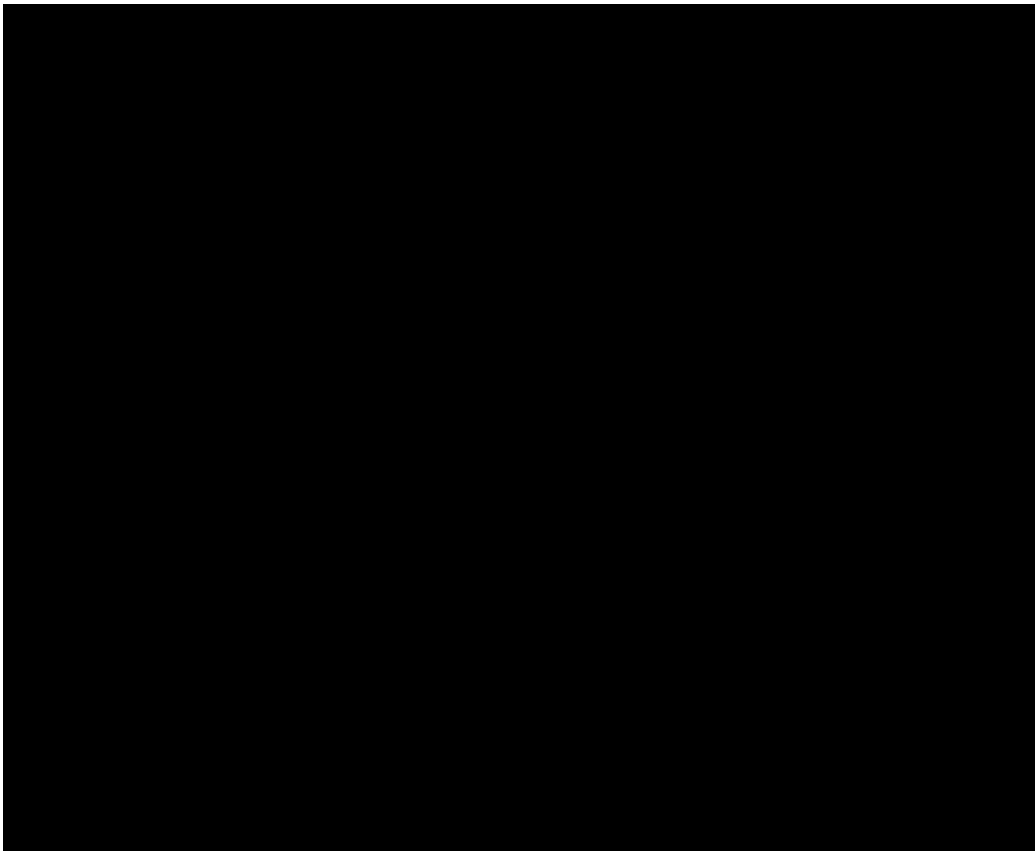
- **I would like us to begin by asking you to reflect and place yourselves along the coaching model (0-10 on the white board) according to how resilient you feel you currently are.** (0 is not resilient at all, 5 is average resilience, 10 is extremely resilient).
- **Now place yourselves along the coaching model according to how resilient you felt before taking part in NCS.....and immediately after NCS**
(Acknowledge changes in memory over time).
- **What is your vision of 10?** (being extremely resilient)
- **Has your resilience been maintained in the 6 months since participating in NCS?**
- **To summarise your definitions from the interviews, resilience is the ability to bounce back, persevere and thrive in spite of challenges. Can you provide an example of a time when you felt you were resilient?** (Not necessarily NCS related).
- **During your interviews it was mentioned that perhaps NCS' focus on developing young people's resilience supplements school provision. School was described as developing knowledge of the brain and NCS as developing knowledge of the mind. What are your views on this?**
- **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Appendix 4 – Coaching approach of perceived resilience

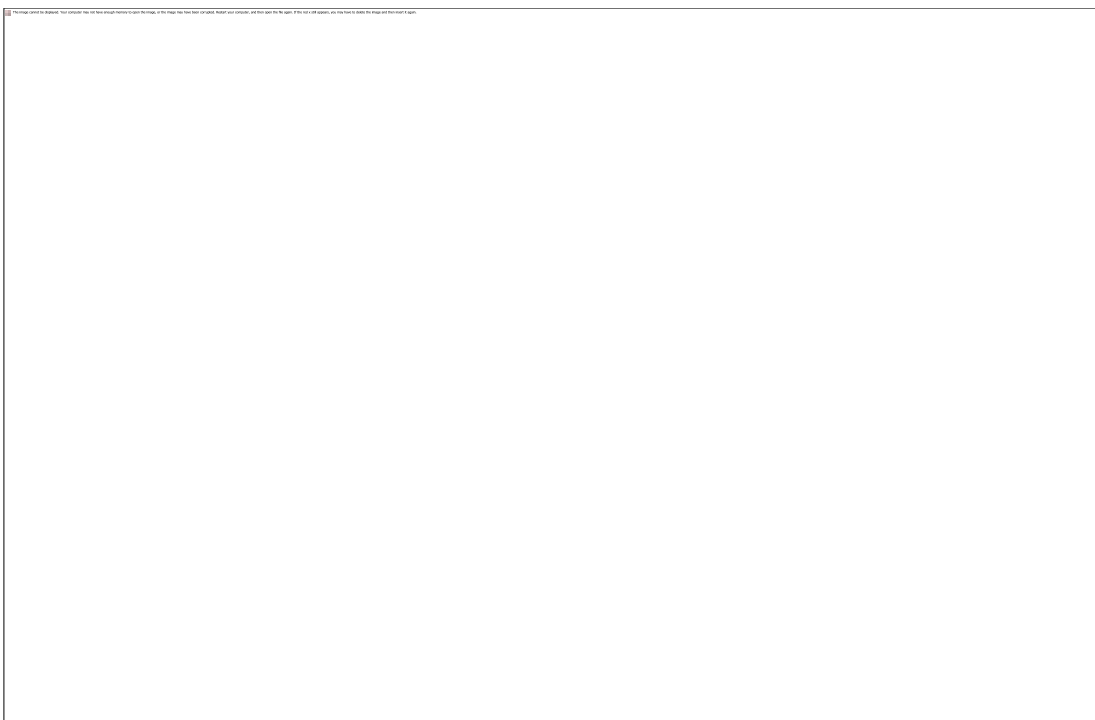


Appendix 5 – Data Analysis

Appendix 5a – Coding of data



Sub-codes to overarching codes



Appendix 5b – Emergence and classification of themes

Data Trees
Bee Interview

Increased confidence and self-esteem, Diverse community, New opportunities and experiences



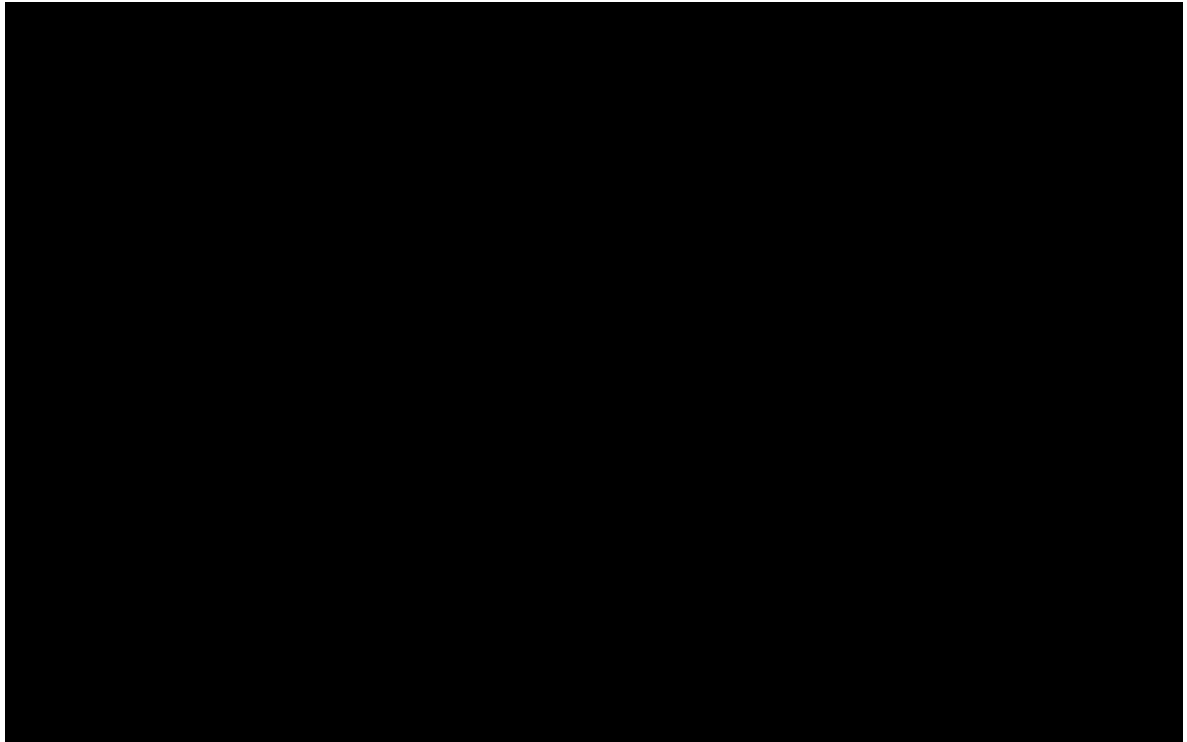
Decision making, Increased confidence and self-esteem, New diverse friendships, New opportunities and experiences, Challenging activities, Bonding, Adaptability, Overcoming challenges, Assumptions challenged, Choice, Diverse Community, Social action, Team work, Lasting effect, Recommend NCS for all



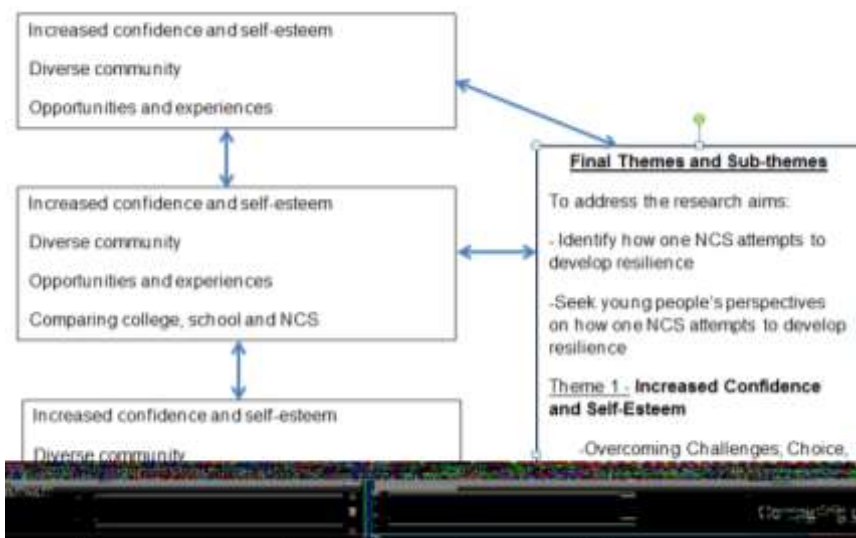
Before NCS lacked confidence, New Friendships, Before NCS desire for change, Decision making, Increased confidence, Increased self-esteem, New diverse friendships, new opportunities, NCS develops resilience, Challenging activities, Bonding, Adaptability, Self-esteem, Overcoming challenges, Assumptions challenged, Choice, Diverse Community, Social action, Team work, Lasting effect of NCS



NCS recruitment, Meet new people, Pleased with decision making, Increased confidence, lacks confidence, Increased self-esteem, New diverse range of friends, Talking to known people for the first time, Different socialising, New opportunity, Loved for who you are, Perseverance, NCS develops resilience, NCS develops positive mind set and outlook, Challenging activities, bonding, Resistance to change, Self-consciousness, assumptions, Activities became more manageable, assumptions challenged, Choice, Enjoyment, Diverse community, Community volunteering, team work, Experience for future, Surprised by own capabilities, Compulsory NCS for all



Theme Tree from interviews and focus group



Appendix 6 – Research Proposal

Working title - An exploration of the concept of resilience in one National Citizen Service (NCS) through the experiences of four young people.

Research problem – The NCS is part of government policy for encouraging social action and inspiring individuals to be more active within their society. It is a flagship initiative in support of the ‘Big Society’ with aims of providing young people with the skills required to become responsible citizens (Cabinet Office, 2013). Due to NCS being a relatively new initiative, there appears to be limited literature exploring the young people’s perceptions of the programme. Although developing resilience has been an aim of NCS since its introduction in 2011, it was only introduced as a measure to their annual evaluation report this year (Booth et al, 2014). This research seeks to explore the problem of a lack of young people’s perspectives of NCS resilience and the problematic nature of resilience. My research aims have been initiated through interest, concern and unanswered questions generated through being an employee of NCS. They have been shaped by actively constructing knowledge through analysing related literature (Silverman, 2013).

Research aims

- To gain an understanding of what constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS.
- To identify how NCS attempts to develop resilience among the young people.
- To seek young people’s perceptions of NCS attempts to develop resilience.

Research questions

- What constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS?
- How does 1 NCS programme attempt to develop resilience among the young people?
- What are the outcomes of this?

Concepts and theory in relation to the research –

The contested concept of resilience (Garmezy, 1974; Herrman et al, 2011; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Shastri, 2013; Ungar, 2005). Points to address: questions of analytical validity of resilience research, tautological? (MacKinnon, 2013). Is resilience always a good thing? Does it neglect the needs of the vulnerable? NCS definition of resilience as the working definition (Booth et al, 2014). Where has the focus on resilience come from? (Liebenberg and Ungar, 2009). Value of it (Hart et al, 2007).

Policy and practice Points to address: The prominence of resilience in current discourse and policy. Why? Implications of this? Where has NCS come from? (Mycock and Tonge, 2011) Operationalised philosophy of resilience, how it comes into practice, policies, assumed ideas of what should be done and their implications? International citizenship. Monitoring is complex, impact of this? (Damon, 2004). A need for practitioner's, policy makers and young people's perspectives by means of gaining a greater insight to inform future practice.

Theoretical Perspectives Points to address: Argument for individual agency (Big Society), social capital, resilient therapy (Hart et al, 2007). Argument for humanism, Maslow's hierarchy of needs? The differences in philosophy and implications of this?

Previous Research Points to address: NCS annual evaluations, international citizenship, resilience factors in young people (Biehal et al, 1995; Brown, 2007; Stein, 2008). Improved social capital and opportunities (Tisdall et al, 2005). Suggested to be successfully promoted through reflection and promotion of social capital (Stein, 2008; The Children's Charity, 2007).

The spectrum of research approaches intertwine the purpose and significance of research and are dependent on relational components comprising ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods (Bartlett et al, 2001). These components are based around Crotty's (1998) four element design and are adapted to include the study of being to explain perceptions of reality and its nature (Gruber, 1993).

Ontology - This is significant to the research as ontology makes assumptions regarding the social reality to be investigated and is, therefore related to the epistemological assumptions of how knowledge of this social reality may be obtained (Blaikie, 2007). Ontology and epistemology are key components to the differentiation of theoretical perspectives yet hold a logical and directional relationship of synthesising to formulate approaches (Grix, 2002). My ontological position will be of a relativist due to establishing understandings and meanings through experience held by individuals which are intersubjectively woven to construct reality (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Consequently there is no collective social reality.

Epistemology - Epistemology is related to the study of knowledge and justified belief (Crotty, 2003). Rather than attempting to discover a truth, my research aims to advance understanding through social interaction (Blaxter and Hughes, 2006). Therefore my epistemological position will be of a constructivist as social interaction

constructs knowledge. Knowledge is not received passively by the individual but actively created (Heylighen, 1997). It is argued that a constructivist epistemological approach develops comprehension of resilience research among young people (Ungar, 2004). These selections are influenced by my personal values and competency. Consequently it is imperative for me to maintain reflexivity and transparency around my own influence on the research (Greenbank, 2003). As an interpretivist researcher I plan to attempt to remain reflexive and self-aware of bias (BERA, 2003). The relationship between my opinions and the research will be recognized as understandings are created within the progression of enquiry, through reflective practice (Cohen et al, 2011). Epistemology is inherent within the theoretical perspective as it provides the philosophical stance for viewing and understanding of the world (Crotty, 2003).

Theoretical perspective – The research questions reflect my stance from an interpretivist theoretical perspective as multiple realities are distinctly relative to individuals (Cohen et al, 2011). It does not propose to determine an answer from a hypothesis and therefore rejects the positivist assumption of a singular reality (Crotty, 2003). The interpretivist approach seeks historically positioned and culturally derived interpretations of the social world (ibid). My research will endeavour to access meanings assigned to social situations in order to ascertain a deeper understanding of developing resilience among young people through NCS (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Such construction of understanding, to be illuminated through the young people's perceptions, is concerned with experiences of individuals within a setting (Lester, 1999). The theoretical perspective, or philosophical stance, provides structure to the methodology and consequently informs the rationality and context behind the research (Crotty, 2003).

Methodology – The research reflects a qualitative methodology as it is noted to allow a holistic approach to research, whilst enabling understanding of the convolution of the subject within its natural environment (Bartlett et al, 2001). Aims of the research centre on exploring perceptions therefore data derived from qualitative methodology encompasses description and emphasis (Arthur et al, 2012). The methodology allows the opportunity to discover perceptions through the use of research tools.

Methods – Triangulation of methods is said to enhance quality of data and reduce bias (Denzin, 2012). The research seeks to gain understanding through the young people's perceptions and therefore the initial method will be semi-structured interviews, shaped by the methodology (Crotty, 2003). Semi-structured interviews will

provide freedom for the context of dialogue, as interaction is valued. However I plan on making participants aware of proposed questions in order to ensure consistency. This method will enable me to structure the backgrounds of the young people into questioning to encourage quality data and a more informed view (Drever, 2003). Following interviews I propose to conduct a focus group to seek collective perspectives, through the young people's interaction (Cohen et al, 2011). I will employ these techniques in this order to eliminate each other's influence from the interviews to enhance quality data. Questions will be piloted and a reflective journal will assist in ensuring reflexivity whilst detailing my own interpretation of events (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Upon analysing the data, the context will be examined by relating data from each of the methods to aid interpretation and enhance rigour (Silverman, 2013).

Data analysis - Thematic analysis facilitates the depiction and categorisation of themes from data to reflect the proposed research questions (Ritchie et al, 2014). Aiming to make meaning from rich, thick data, reoccurring patterns will be coded under staged progression to provide structure (Boyatzis, 1998). The codes will be reviewed to enrich quality, and then undergo analysis to illuminate areas of discrepancy and convergence and salience of themes (Hartas, 2010). I intend to undertake a strategy which combines inductive and deductive approaches to allow for pre-determined themes and the emergence of new ones (Wiling, 2013). In order to maintain reflexivity I must remain aware of predicted themes which may not be highlighted, and vigilant to misinterpreting data (Clayton, 2013).

Ethics – Primary ethical concerns will be for the privacy, safety and protection of participant's however I will be accountable for safeguarding NCS, myself and the university (Resnik, 2011). Throughout the process of research I aim to acknowledge and reflect upon the British Education Ethical Association (2012) ethical guidelines for research in education. Ethical considerations will account for anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and awareness of the right to withdraw at any time.

Limitations – It is natural for limitations of a study to occur and as an interpretivist researcher acknowledging these limitations ensures the research's validity and credibility (O'Leary, 2010). To combat a potential limitation of a lack of time for data collection and analysis I am in the process of producing a time plan with proposed mini-deadlines and will discuss this with my supervisor in our next meeting. A criticism of resilience research is that it is tautological (MacKinnon, 2013). However I plan to clearly define a working term informed by NCS in an attempt to reduce this. Another

potential limitation may be that due to my previous employment with NCS, the young people taking part in the research know me. This raises ethical concerns of my influence on the data collected. Undertaking reflective practice through the form of a research journal will contribute to maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process.

Discussion points for supervisor –

- Review of time plan. Is it achievable?
- Will interviews and a focus group with 4 young people be appropriate for the scale of this research? – pilots

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Appendix 7 - Letter of consent and information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

Dear participant,

I am currently a student at The University of Brighton on the BA (Hons) Education course and am conducting a small-scale research study around the concept of resilience within the National Citizen Service (NCS). Thank you for expressing interest in participating in the small-scale study. Please take some time to read the following in order to understand what will be involved and why the research is being undertaken, before considering if you would like to take part in the research.

The working title of my research is:

- An exploration of the concept of resilience in one NCS through the experiences of four young people.

And asks the questions:

- What constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS?
- What are young people's perspectives on how NCS attempts to develop resilience?
- What are the outcomes of this?

My research aims to:

- Gain an understanding of what constitutes resilience in the eyes of NCS
- Seek young people's perspectives on how one NCS attempts to develop resilience
- Identify outcomes

I would like to ask your permission to participate in the interview and focus group process. The semi-structured interview will last approximately 15 minutes and will be recorded on a Dictaphone. As will the focus group, which will last approximately 20 minutes and comprise of four participants. All information you provide will be kept safely and deleted on completion of the research study. As a participant you have the right to withdraw from the process at any time and I would like to take the opportunity to highlight the possibility of emotional triggers during the process. You will not be named or be in any other way identifiable throughout the research. This is also the case for your NCS organisation. By taking part, there is potential for you to reflect and

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reminisce about your time spent with NCS last summer. By way of saying thank you, tea and cake will be provided after the focus group.

Before the interview and focus group goes ahead I would like to confirm that:

- The interview and focus group will be recorded with your permission.
- A transcript of the interview and focus group will be made available to you. I would kindly ask you to read them and confirm your contributions. This will also provide you with the opportunity to withdraw any information if you so wish.
- Anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of likely questions will be given to you prior to the interview and focus group. *(A proposed interview schedule is attached with this letter)*
- A copy of the completed research study will be made available to you upon request.

If you would like to discuss the research further please contact me at aracher@bishopbell.co.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, contact my supervisor: Tim Coxon, Checkland Building, University of Brighton, T.Coxon@brighton.ac.uk

If you agree to be interviewed and take part in the focus group we will discuss an appropriate time and place for it to take place, which is convenient for you. Finally, may I thank you for taking the time to read this and considering to be part of my research.

Please can you give permission to be interviewed by completing the following consent form and returning to me.

Yours Sincerely,

Aimi Racher

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

Participant consent form

- I agree to participate in this research, which is to explore the concept of resilience in one NCS through the experiences of 4 young people.
- The research has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the research and potential risks and benefits of taking part.
- I have read the information sheet and I understand the procedures involved.
- I am aware that I will be required to answer questions during in interviews and participate in discussions during the focus group.
- I understand that any confidential information will only be heard and seen by the researcher and not revealed to anyone else.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.
- I agree that should you withdraw from the research, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.

Name (*please print*).....

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix 8 – Ethical Reflection

Ethical considerations permeated and guided all phases of the research (Hartas, 2010).

Appendix 8a - My influence as a previous employee of NCS

I was a member of staff for the particular NCS and cohort under study. Therefore, I formed certain assumptions and views as the programme challenged my usual ways of working, as an employee at a mainstream secondary school. For example, with NCS I was required to socialise with the young people outside of the structured timetable, which could be viewed as inappropriate within mainstream education. I found myself having to wrestle with the differing approaches I felt confronted with. Critical reflection has allowed me to recognise that this alternative approach is not wrong, but that it is a different, perhaps, more holistic way of building positive relationships with young people. This approach shapes the organisational culture of this particular NCS but did not match the organisational culture of my main employment. Recognition of this prompted me to question my own values. This evidences reflection on uncertainty, which is suggested to enhance an individual's employability (Schon, 1992). Such critical incidents have assisted in increasing my self-awareness of the influence of previous experiences on current practice. I now find myself reflecting-in-action whilst at work (Schon, 1983)

Entering the process with prior assumptions and knowledge has proven to raise ethical challenges for the research. Concerns were initially highlighted during discussion with my tutor. Through such acknowledgement, I viewed myself as holding predisposed interpretations and values which I was unable to entirely disconnect from. However, as an interpretivist researcher I

attempted to reduce any influence through active awareness of bias and so, aligned myself with the stance of an insider researcher. Such alignment was in acknowledgment of my position of involvement within the research setting (Cohen et al, 2011). Undertaking this type of research stance provided me with access to potential research participants and may have resulted in a greater understanding of findings due to prior knowledge (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). However, my relationship with participants prior to their involvement and our shared knowledge, held the potential for the young people to be offended by the study's findings (Mercer, 2007). In order to reduce the potential of this occurring, I have attempted to remain aware of tensions within the research and data collection process, and in addition, member checking has been undertaken.

Appendix 8b – Critical awareness of changes in memory over time

This ethical consideration concerns critical awareness of changes in memory over time. It was first brought to my attention during a discussion with peers from university, regarding the coaching approach I was considering. Having decided to include participants' self-perception of whether their resilience had increased or not, and whether such increase had been sustained up to six months later, I became aware that their perceptions would be based on memory. This raised consciousness further to the view that any data collected would also potentially derive from the memories of the young people. Such raised consciousness prompted my thoughts to return to the BA (Hons) Education module: Reframing Identity. Memory can be described as elastic, constantly re-forming and re-shaping (Ferryhough, 2012). Acevedo-Triana et al (2013) suggest that over time, memories can become distorted through their recollection. The more a memory is revisited, there is increased likelihood it will become distorted (ibid). Therefore, I realised I was faced with the ethical

challenge of maintaining awareness of potential memory distortion. The consideration speaks to the interpretivist nature of the research as I remained aware of potential implications for reliability of data. Reflective of this study and in spite of implications of changes in memory over time, Hayler (2010) argues that by revisiting events and attempting to understand them, insights into individual experiences are illuminated to develop knowledge and skills.

Appendix 9 – Supporting data

Appendix 9a - Young peoples' definitions of resilience

Kay – *Resilience for me is the art of perseverance. It is being presented with an obstacle or challenge and overcoming it which happened all the time on NCS!*

Val – *It's not just to survive, but thrive. If you can't do something the first time, try and try again.*

Bee - *Perseverance. If you are having a difficult time you can bounce back from it and persevere to help yourself. Resilience is when you keep trying no matter what.*

Jay – *To adapt to whatever situation you find yourself in and manage.*

Appendix 9b – Discussion of an extremely resilient person from Focus Group

Bee - *Someone who is extremely confident. When some people fall down then sometimes they find it hard to bounce back again and I think that people who are extremely resilient don't have that. It's like nothing fazes them.*

Val – *Yes I'd quite like to be more like that. I think people who are really resilient don't necessarily feel as deeply. They cope better and that could mean that when they fall down and have to bounce back again, they don't feel as much.*

Kay – *I don't think anyone could ever get to be a 10 [extremely resilient], because I think it's a vision of what we would all like to be, you know? When people are criticised and it doesn't bother them but in reality that's really hard to do. I've never met anyone who doesn't say that they find certain things difficult and find hard to get back up again. Do those people exist?*

Jay - *Well although I placed myself as 9, I think 10 could be potentially damaging as if you weren't affected by certain things you'd be...*

Kay – *Arrogant!*

All – *Yeah!*

Appendix 9c – Confidence and Self-esteem

Bee - *It [NCS] has made me more confident although I still lack confidence at times. And it has boosted my self-esteem*

Appendix 9d – Increased confidence through overcoming challenges

Kay - *I think on residential week we were constantly presented with challenges we thought were impossible but we would overcome them. For me I found that I only think something is a challenge until I actually do it and then once I'd done it I'd think that it wasn't even a challenge... I feel I am now confident and resilient enough to accept and like myself.*

Appendix 9e - Judging

Bee - *I assumed everyone would judge me... eventually I realised that no-one was judging me.*

Appendix 9f – Positive relationships with staff

Val - *I thought the staff were great, really inspiring and approachable.*

Appendix 9g – Significance of team work to project success

Val - *The sense of community established in the first 2 weeks meant that when complications arose in the social action project, we were able to overcome them together and move forward.*

Bee - *I found the social action project challenging as there were people who were choosing to participate less than others and it was hard to motivate some people. But we worked through it and made it a success.*

Kay - *On the social action project my resilience developed by working with people and cooperating. Our team worked together to overcome challenges.*

Jay – *I really enjoyed being part of a team. If we hadn't worked together so well, we couldn't have achieved all that we did.*

Appendix 9h - Active participation in new opportunities and experiences

Val - *Through taking part in NCS I have been exposed to more opportunities. I have presented on behalf of NCS at a local youth fair and I am involved in a project where I visit schools and talk about poetry, which is a great passion of mine, to help the children with their feelings.*

Kay – *[NCS] went so quickly. Our days were so filled with activities and doing new things that time just flew by. It has inspired me to continue living an active life.*

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- Bee – *All the new activities were eye-opening. I really enjoyed the martial arts workshop, everyone got involved and had lots of fun and it is something I would never have thought of doing. The whole thing [NCS] was really active...I also enjoyed being able to give back to the community and it is something I have continued with as I now volunteer for a local mental health charity*
- Jay – *I live an active life as I am always doing sports and activities with cadets. NCS just carried that on for me and gave me new opportunities and experiences that I haven't had before.*

Appendix 10 – Reflective learning journal extracts

Appendix 10a – Awareness of an informed view

PebblePad entry 28/02/2015

My ever increasing informed view means my previously held assumptions, of the NCS under study, are being challenged and further established due to unearthing new information. I have also noticed this happening with the concept of resilience itself. Despite undertaking previous research in the field of resilience development in young people, alternative and fresh perspectives of the concept are emerging. I have been fortunate enough to form new networks with those in the field and hearing their views is filling my mind with questions – which seem quite difficult to keep track of. It is as though my brain is overflowing at the moment. Despite this feeling and as a result of the process of research, I have become more open-minded as I have been reminded that people can never 'know it all', so to speak. I am appreciative of this process as I feel it will contribute to reducing bias during data collection and analysis.

Appendix 10b – Piloting interviews and focus group

PebblePad entry 23/03/2015

I found the piloting of interview questions and the focus group to be beneficial for the research and my experience. The process has allowed me to reflect-in-action as I was able to re-arrange questions and listen to the views of my university peers who took part. Consequently, questions have been shaped in an hour-glass fashion; broad in the beginning, becoming narrower and then broad again. A concern was raised around whether I would be able to successfully distinguish who was talking when listening back to the focus

group recording. Undertaking a pilot and discussing the concern with my tutor has assured me that I can. Therefore, I am no longer considering the use of a co-researcher, which is also due to ethical and organisational reasons.

Appendix 10c – Critical awareness of why the young people participated

PebblePad entry 22/03/2015

Via discussions with my tutor, critical consciousness has been raised around why the participants have chosen to take part in my research. As a member of staff for NCS I was not their group leader. They were all part of different groups. However, of the one hundred young people who undertook this particular NCS over summer 2014, I felt the four participants of this research, were among the young people whom I was able to build positive relationships with. This raises questions as to why? On reflection, I am able to identify each of the participants as holding prominent, influential positions within their NCS community. I recall mentioning my possible research intentions to Kay at the NCS graduation. I was not aware at the time but with hindsight I can see that I did this because I held Kay to be an influential person over her peers. She passed my research intentions onto her friends and assisted in identifying those who were interested and wanted to help.

Revisited 30/03/2015

Further reflection, after each of the interviews, has highlighted critical awareness of potential personal motivations of the participants for taking part. Each of the young people has spoken of their personal enjoyment and satisfaction from participating in the research. During interviews I could see the value they placed on re-visiting their NCS experience through their animated responses and body language. They all appeared to want to promote the value

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of NCS and so, participating in my research may have contributed to their goal
of spreading the word of its positive effects.

Appendix 11 – Thank you letter to participants

48 Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN

17th March 2015

Dear _____,

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for participating in my research. I found your input informative and insightful, which comes through in the data. Your participation in my research is highly appreciated and your contributions have proved to be invaluable. You have provided me with a different perspective and my knowledge has been developed as a result.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Aimi Racher

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Appendix 12 – Tutorial forms