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**Making a claim for services:  
Supporting vulnerable young people's engagement with  
services**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

This thesis examined vulnerable young people's experiences of becoming involved with services. Through analysing first-person accounts shared by youth and parents/caregivers in qualitative interviews, it sought to examine the process by which youth become fully engaged with services. The thesis had a particular interest in examining the barriers and the factors that facilitated young people's engagement with services. The youth had complex needs and were involved with more than one service. These services included child welfare, youth justice, alternative and specialised education, and mental health services.

The concept of *making a claim for services* emerged from the analysis as an explanatory device that captured the process of service engagement. Young people's engagement with services was a complex, on-going process that was shaped by a range of factors. Making a claim was a critical first step in young people's engagement. It represented an on-going, interactive process between clients and service providers of developing an understanding of client needs, what help services could offer, and what a meaningful and relevant service response would entail. There were three key factors in making a claim for services: first, young people's needs and service entry criteria; second, opportunities for youth and their parents/caregivers to exercise personal agency in the help-seeking process; and third, relevant and meaningful service responses.

The findings of this thesis have implications for all service providers working with vulnerable youth. This thesis indicated that service engagement is an on-going process that is shaped by a range of factors. The youth in the thesis had to navigate a range of challenging contexts, for example at home, at school, and in their relationships with others. Service providers working with vulnerable youth need to ensure that they consider the contextual factors that influence young people's engagement with services and work to foster supportive and empowering relationships with youth and their family/whānau. Training for service providers, both through tertiary institutions and in-post training, could support the development of this area of practice.

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