Anam Cara support for sustainability of young persons' decisions in challenging contexts

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores how Indian youth learn to say "No" and sustain self-love in challenging contexts. Coming from diverse urban schools and colleges across India, participants told how they engaged in activities that sustain effective personal decision making, positive affirmation and self love while learning to say No" in a particular context of their own choosing. The case study investigates how outcomes of "saying No" were sustained over time and how effective support mechanisms could help youths uphold their decisions as life contexts changed. All participants established and benefitted from interacting with Anam Caras (Soul Friends). The benefits identified here included: Supportive Anam Cara relationships as safety nets; Setting boundaries: asserting self-love through limits; Positive affirmation: replacing rumination with self-compassion; “No” as a new beginning: bouncing forward into opportunities; The Anam Cara as a psychological anchor; Internalising the Anam Cara voice; The Anam Cara and identity reconstruction; Sustainability through repetition and reflection. The concluding section of this paper, describe show the results gained from this case study open up practical opportunities for developments predicated on "bouncing forward".

Keywords: Sustainable decision support; Aman Cara ontology, Positive regard, Indian young people

1. Introduction

In this qualitative case study, we explore how 15 participants aged 18–25 (8 female and 7 male) from diverse urban schools and colleges across India learned to say “No” in challenging contexts. with decision support founded on "Aman Cara: implementations of a fundamental process ontology" (Bedi, Brezillon and Humphreys, 2026). Each participant told us how they were able to engaged in activities that sustained effective personal decision making, positive affirmation and self love while learning to say "No" in a context of their own choosing. This multi-case design enabled comparison of Anam Cara-based decision support, while respecting each person’s unique decision context (Brezillon and Pomerol (2001) . We investigate whether the outcomes of "saying No" were sustained over time with comprehensive support, and how Aman Cara support mechanisms could help youths uphold their decisions as life contexts changed (for example, entering college or joining new social groups).

We draw on Jyotika Bedi’s (2024) self-love framework which emphasises strengths-focused coping practices (e.g. present-moment awareness, positive self-talk) and celebration of small victories. From a humanistic perspective, Carl Rogers (1967)'s concept of "unconditional positive regard" informed our approach: interviewers showed empathy and non-judgment to create a safe space and assumed each youth had the capacity for growth. Our conceptual framework integrates the Anam Cara Ontology with relevant psychological and social theories. "Anam cara" (Gaelic for “soul friend”) traditionally refers to a spiritually intimate, supportive friend; We found that all our participants had established and benefitted from interacting with Anam Caras (Soul Friends).

The benefits identified here included: Supportive Anam Cara relationships as safety nets; Setting boundaries: asserting self-love through limits; Positive affirmation: replacing rumination with self-compassion; “No” as a new beginning: bouncing forward into opportunities; The Anam Cara as a

psychological anchor; Internalising the Anam Cara voice; The Anam Cara and identity reconstruction; Sustainability through repetition and reflection. In the concluding section of this paper, we describe how the results gained from this case study open up practical opportunities for developments on "bouncing forward"

2. Making "rational choice" decision support sustainable

The fundamental task facing a decision maker in a particular context situated is how to resolve uncertainty about how to go about developing a prescription for action and get it implemented.
The desire to take some action is generated from a feeling that there is a lack (or a "gap": see Lacan, 1976) between the actual state of affairs (as perceived by the decision maker) and some imaginable preferred state. The decision maker starts out, at the level of feeling, with complete freedom about how to think about how to translate this desire into action. until structural constraints are placed on the way the problem is represented, all imaginable courses of action are candidates for implementation.
The decision maker, in order to act, must first strengthen the constraints at 5 qualitatively different levels of how the problem is represented until only one course of action is prescribed: the one which is actually embarked upon. Humphreys 2007). These are:

At Level 5, The small world (Toda 1977) in which his or her problem is located is explored by the decision maker; At Level 4, problem expressing discourse is employed to make claims that particular elements of what was explored should (or should not) be included in the representation of the decision problem. At level 3, these claims can be linked into frames so that their collective implications for the decision can be explored. We have found that the frames actually used in organisational and personal decision framing discourse usually fit into the following three principal categories: (i) Rule-based frames; (ii) Future scenario frames, and (iii) Preference structuring frames. At Level 2, through asking "what-if questions" the decision maker investigates the impact of changing the assessment of elements within the structure. Finally, at level , the remaining task is to make best assessments of 'the most likely value' at those points in the represented problem that have previously been represented as 'uncertain'.

Herbert Simon's (1977) widely accepted "rational choice" conceptualisation of the decision-making process offered widely accepted model for the progressive strengthening of these constraints in decision making practice ,Simon identified the four Stage in "rational choice as follows:

- In the Intelligence phase , the decision maker "searches for the conditions that call for decision";
- In the Design phase , the decision maker focuses on "inventing, developing and analysing possible courses of action", thus authoring the outcomes represented in the decision-making model;
- In the Choice phase and the Review phase, the decision maker focuses on "selecting and reviewing a particular course of action from those available" according to what has been represented in the model.

However, as Pomerol and Adam (2008, p 930) explain:

> "A key consequence of Simon's observations and ideas is that decisions and the actions that follow them cannot easily be distinguished".

2.1. Rational-choice decision support can leave you trapped in overthinking

Within an individualised decision support perspective, "Rational choice", as implemented by Simon (1977), requires that the decision maker commit to a course of action that will be implemented in reality by him/herself .

When, in Simon's Review phase, implementation failure risks become evident, the decision maker realises that these risks have to be managed from his/her own resources (Berkeley et al., 1990), But in contexts where the individual decision maker does not have the capability or agency to achieve this, the procedural question emerging is “what do?”In such contexts, the decision makers usually finds him or herself left “adrift in a sea of implementation uncertainty” (Humphreys and Berkeley, 1995) where one is "trapped in continual overthinking" that leads one around in circles . Because of this result, Rational-Choice based decision support is not in itself sustainable in situations where potential "courses of action" that are represented and explored (in ways that conventional decision- making process methodologies promote) tend to end up in blocked opportunities, undesirable consequences or require non-available resources, and so all receive negative evaluation within the preference frame. Bedi (2024, p152) comments: "One of the biggest pandemics affecting humanity today is overthinking. This silent affliction paralyses us with endless circles of doubt and worry, overshadowing or potential peace of mind we spiral to if and if only's trapped in a web of our own making."

2.2. The logic of appropriateness: the importance of self-love

Breaking free from this web of overthinking, requires that the decision maker makes a change in his or her perspective explorations within which his or her initial "Rational Choice" perspective gets supplanted by activities predicated on the "logic of Appropriateness" (March and Olson (2013) whereby humans maintain a repertoire of roles and identities providing rules of appropriate behaviour in situations for which they are relevant. Following these rules involves thoughtful, reasoning that is not connected to the anticipation of costs and benefits Rather, the presumption is that actors will generally try to answer three elementary questions, when deciding on what action to take with support that can be gained from Aman Caras ("soul friends. These fundamental questions are: "What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this? Self-love, is not merely self-acceptance or self-care but a deeper form of emotional literacy that allows individuals to decode their inner experiences in accord with the Logic of Appropriateness. It encourages decision-makers to ask questions such as, “Why does this make me uncomfortable?” or “Why do I feel the need to comply when I don't agree?” These questions are central to the recognition of personal limits. Bedi’s (2024) self-love model outlines three pillars pillars: (i) *Awareness* involves recognising what feels uncomfortable or out of alignment. This may be as subtle as emotional fatigue after a conversation, or as stark as physical distress in toxic environments; (ii) *Acceptance* challenges the shame and denial often attached to these feelings. It allows the individual to say, "Yes, this is real for me," without the need for external justification; (iii) *Action* is the step where internal clarity is translated into external decisions, such as saying "no", or redefining a relationship.

3. Anam cara Ontology: a single, unified world

Anam Cara is an anglicisation of the Irish words anam meaning "soul" and cara meaning "friend". The term was popularised by John O'Donaghue (2022). In the Celtic tradition, "Soul Friends" are considered TO BE an essential and integral part of personal and spiritual development. *Anam Cara, Implementation of a Fundamental Process Ontology* (Bedi, Brezillon and Humphreys, 2026) presumes a single unified, all inclusive world that is accessed and explored as a rhizome[1] (Deleuze and Guatarri,1987), within human consciousness that gives access to this world through its operations.

[1]“Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real…It is itself part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible constant modifications. (It can be torn reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12)

We all inhabit this world individually, whereby it is accessed through our own consciousness, and in that sense is a totally alive spiritual world. Thus, we may exhibit "spirituality" at an individual having a spiritual envelop that occupies a body (a physical dimension accessed as a function of conscious experience.

This conceptualisation of the Unified World addressed by the Anam Cara Ontology was predominant in ancient history. In recent times it has been linked with the Concept of "Dasein". In German, "Dasein" is the vernacular term for "Existence". It is derived from da-sein, which literally means "being-there" or "there-being". In a philosophical context, it was first used by Leibniz and Wolff in the 17th century, as well as by Kant and Hegel in the 18th and 19th. centuries. Recently, Heidegger (1953) used it to refer to the mode of being that is particular to human beings. It is a form of being that is aware of and must confront such issues as personhood, mortality, and the dilemma or paradox of living in relationship with other humans while being ultimately alone with oneself." [2]

3.1 What is an Anam Cara?

An Anam Cara can offer four critical functions in supporting emotional sustainability:

1. Personal Mirror: Helping the individual recognise emotional signals, internal conflicts, and suppressed needs – fostering self-awareness.
2. Interpersonal Buffer: Providing protection against shame, social pressure, and manipulation – creating a sanctuary of safety.
3. Community Connector: Normalising values-based choices within peer or institutional contexts – reducing isolation.
4. Institutional Challenger: Modelling compassionate accountability when confronted by systems that reward compliance over authenticity – enabling systemic reflection..

In our case study project, each of these functions reinforced a young person's capacity to maintain their decision to say "No" in the face of internal or external regression.

4. Research Design and Conceptual Framework

Our case study investigation was designed to provide a practical Proof of Concept plus Proof of Value test for the features of the Anam Cara Ontology described above: In this qualitative case study, we deeply explored how Indian youth learn to say N"o" and sustain self-love in challenging contexts. Focusing on fifteen individuals (aged 18–25, 8 female and 7 male) from diverse urban schools and colleges across India, each participant's decision-making journey served as an embedded case of the broader phenomenon. This multi-case design enabled cross-case comparison of decision-making patterns while respecting each person's unique context. Our study centred on the process by which youths refuse pressures or expectations ("saying no") and the outcomes of those decisions. We asked whether positive outcomes of saying "No" were sustained over time with sufficient support and investigated how effective support mechanisms could help youths uphold their decisions as life contexts changed (for example, entering college or joining new social groups).

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[2] Such conceptualisations continue today in many current practices, especially contemporary versions of Mindfulness informed by secular Buddhism (Hays, 2024) and by developments of Celtic Hagiography such as McIntosh (2011), O'Donahue,(2023) and Simpson (2021).

Additionally, we viewed participants as co-authors of their own narratives (a narrative therapy stance), capable of re-authoring their experiences struggles into empowering life stories.

4.1 Participants and recruitment

Fifteen youth (8 female, 7 male, ages 18–25) were recruited purposively from diverse educational institutions in urban India. School counsellors and youth organisations assisted in identifying individuals who had recently faced difficult personal or social situations requiring them to say "No" to significant pressures (for example, resisting peer pressure or defying a prescribed academic or career path). Participation was voluntary, and we obtained written informed consent from all participants (with parental consent for minors). We ensured diversity in socio-economic background, religion, and region to reflect India's cultural heterogeneity.Each participant selected the specific decision context that was most meaningful to them. For example, one chose "handling a misunderstanding with my friend," another "resisting family pressure to enter a national sports championship," and another "navigating a rift between a student and teacher at school." Using participant-defined scenarios heightened the relevance of the inquiry and gave participants ownership of the research process.

In Stage 1 of data collection, participants completed a brief questionnaire collecting demographic details and a written summary of their chosen situation. Gathering these details in advance allowed us to form a balanced cohort and tailor interview questions to each person's context (for instance, by using culturally appropriate examples). It also helped establish initial rapport, as writing about the experience beforehand gave participants some control and time to prepare, reducing anxiety. Asking youths to share their story at this stage was itself an empowering act that confirmed to them that their voice was valued.

4.2 Data collection procedures

These involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant, using an interview guide designed to explore their decision-making process and the multi-level support systems around them. We used open-ended questions to invite narrative accounts – for example: "Can you tell me what happened when you decided to say no in that situation? How did you feel and what did you do next?" – and then probed three key domains of the Anam Cara framework to capture different forms of support: (i) Interactions with a living Anam Cara: Did the participant have a physically present "soul friend" or mentor? We asked them to identify any friend, family member, or other person who played a guiding or supportive role, and to describe how that person helped them through the experience; (ii) Interactions with a spiritual Anam Cara: Did the participant draw on support from a spiritual or non-present figure (for example, a deceased relative, a religious figure, or an imagined confidant)? This recognised the role of faith, ancestral guidance, or inner spiritual resources in self-love and resilience; (iii) Community and institutional resources: We inquired about broader sources of support, such as peer groups, teachers or counsellors at school, online communities, or self-help resources. We also asked whether any organisational or institutional factors (e.g. school policies or cultural norms) influenced their ability to set boundaries. Each interview lasted about 60–90 minutes and was conducted in a private setting chosen by the participant to ensure comfort and confidentiality. We conducted interviews in the participant's preferred language (English or Hindi), with occasional code-switching as needed. Interviewers (the lead

researcher and a trained assistant) introduced themselves as empathetic, non-judgmental listeners to build rapport and encourage participants to speak openly.

4.3 Data analysis

We analysed the data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Our approach combined deductive and inductive coding. Initially, we applied a provisional coding framework based on our theoretical lenses (for example, themes like "boundary-setting" and "positive affirmation" drawn from self-love model of Bedi, 2024) and then refined this framework iteratively as new patterns emerged from the transcripts. Two researchers independently read each transcript in full to become familiar with the content and generated initial codes (using NVivo software to organise the data). These codes were then collated into broader candidate themes, which the team reviewed and refined through discussion. Related themes were merged or redefined as needed – for instance, codes related to self-confidence and assertiveness were combined into a single theme of "Empowerment through Boundary-Setting." Each final theme was mapped to one of the four Anam Cara levels (personal, interpersonal, community, institutional) to ensure our analysis captured influences at every level. In the final phase, we defined and named the themes and produced detailed analytic memos integrating participant quotes with relevant theory. Throughout the process, the team remained reflexive: we regularly discussed how our own perspectives or cultural assumptions might influence interpretation, and we ensured that our findings stayed grounded in the participants' own accounts.

4.4 Ethical considerations and researcher positioning

All participants gave informed consent (with parental consent for minors) and were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. We guaranteed confidentiality: any identifying details (names of people, specific school or city names) were omitted or generalised in transcripts, and we used pseudonyms (e.g. Participant 10) in reporting. All digital data (audio recordings, transcripts) were securely stored in encrypted files accessible only to the research team.[3]

We were conscious of power dynamics between researchers and youth. To mitigate this, we adopted a friendly, youth-centred approach. Interviewers emphasised that they were learners interested in the participant's perspective, not judges, and they spoke in an empathetic, non-authoritarian tone. The lead researcher's familiarity with Indian culture and multilingual background helped build rapport, but we also remained aware of our own biases (for example, a personal belief in the benefits of mindfulness). The team kept reflexive journals and consulted an external peer auditor to ensure that our conclusions were grounded in participants' accounts rather than our preconceptions.

We prioritised participants' emotional safety throughout the interviews. We made it clear that participants could skip any question or stop at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Interviewers responded to any distress with empathy and normalisation (for example, saying "It's understandable you felt hurt in that situation"), affirming that upset feelings were valid. After each interview, we debriefed participants to

[3] Ethical approval was obtained from Delhi University's Human Research Ethics Committee before the study began.

thank them, ask how they felt, and address any concerns. Many youths reported feeling positively about the conversation – one even remarked, "I've never actually talked about this fully before, it feels good" – suggesting the interview process itself had been somewhat therapeutic.**.** All participants who began the study completed it. At the end of the study, we provided each participant with a summary of the findings written in accessible, youth-friendly language so they could see the knowledge gained from their contributions. With participants' permission, we also plan to share aggregated results with school counsellors and youth programs to benefit the communities from which our participants came. In sum, our methodology was designed with careful attention to rigour, cultural sensitivity, and compassion, laying a strong foundation for the credible and meaningful findings that follow.

5. Results: From Rational Choice uncertainty to authentic decisions

All participants began by identifying a situation in which they needed to say "no." These situations ranged from academic and career dilemmas to family and peer-pressure scenarios. In the first stage, nearly every youth initially took a rational choice, cost–benefit approach: they made mental lists of advantages and disadvantages of saying no versus yes. This mirrored a classic "logic of consequences," aiming to maximise benefits and minimise costs. For example, one young woman agonised over refusing a friend's plea to copy homework. She weighed the risk of losing the friendship (a "cost") against the stress of compromising her integrity. Similarly, another youth considering his parents' plan listed the repercussions: "They might be angry, I might fail on my own, but I'd be unhappy if I complied." Such reflections show bounded rationality at work: trying to decide logically under uncertainty.

However, as participants moved toward action, pure cost–benefit reasoning often felt insufficient. Nearly all described a turning point towards the Logic of Appropriateness (March and Olsen, 2013) where they began to ask, "What is right for me in this situation?" This more values-driven question aligns with a "logic of appropriateness," where decisions are guided by identity and values rather than utility alone. Accordingly, participants began invoking their self-concepts. For instance, Participant 8 ultimately realised, "I'm an artist at heart, not a businessman – if I say "yes "and join the business, I'd be living a lie." In another case, a youth ending a toxic friendship framed her choice in terms of integrity: she asked, "Do I want to be the kind of person who tolerates betrayal? The answer was NO." In these reflections, personal values overtook immediate consequences.

This values-based deliberation was often catalysed by guidance from a trusted confidant In many instances, a mentor or AnAm Cara counsellor (an "Anam Cara"; posed key questions. For example, one school counsellor asked a participant, "What matters more to you – honesty or keeping everyone happy?" Such prompts helped youths frame the situation (for example, as a test of honesty) and see their role (as a friend who values honesty). In effect, they stepped through defining the context, identifying their valued identity in it, and choosing an action to match that identity. The data show that once participants answered these questions, their decision became clear and resolute. Many participants described feeling a sense of internal alignment or peace when they chose the option that matched their authentic values.

5.1 Access to Anam Caras: supportive relationships as safety nets

Every participant reported having at least one Anam Cara – a trusted confidant or "soul friend" – to lean on. In fact, most named several. Common categories included Friends: e.g. best friend (11 of the 15

youths); Family: parent, aunt, or sibling (about one-third); Teachers or mentors: e.g. a school counsellor or coach. Spiritual guides: e.g. one youth drew strength from Lord Shiva; another from a late grandparent. Participants described these Anam Caras as listening without judgment and offering understanding and support. For example, one youth said her soul friend was "the one person who understands what I'm going through with my parents and doesn't make me feel wrong for wanting something different." Another noted that her brother "always reminds me that I have the right to make my own choices." Often youths "tested the waters" by discussing dilemmas with an Anam Cara before acting; this gave them validation and confidence. Importantly, true Anam Caras upheld the youth's choice. After one participant ended a controlling relationship, his friend reassured him: "'Whatever happens, I've got your back. If you need a place to crash after the breakup, my door is open." That support made him feel secure enough to go through with his decision. In another case, a family friend intervened with disapproving parents, effectively advocating for the youth's choice. These examples show how confidants not only listened but could even help persuade others.

This unconditional support resembles Carl Rogers' (1977) concept of unconditional positive regard. Knowing that an Anam Cara accepted them "no matter what" gave participants the courage to stay true to themselves. In short, a network of supportive Anam Caras – friends, family, mentors, or even spiritual guides – served as an emotional safety net. Having someone in their corner validated youths' decisions and made them more confident and resilient in saying "No".

5.2 Setting boundaries: asserting self-love through limits

Learning to say "No" was essentially about setting healthy boundaries. Eleven of fifteen youths described the process as drawing a line to protect themselves. They often framed the change as moving from 'being 'a people-pleaser' or 'too submissive' to 'knowing my limits' and 'standing up for myself'. Participants shared several examples of boundary-setting. One common scenario was resisting peer pressure. For example, Participant 6 worried that studying for exams while friends partied would make him lose friendships. His girlfriend (an Anam Cara) reminded him that a real friend "wouldn't want you to harm your future for a night of fun." With her encouragement, he simply told his friends, "No, I need to study." He found that after doing this once, it got easier, and his friends respected him more.Another scenario involved family expectations. One young woman (Participant 2) faced pressure from her father to enter an arranged marriage. She firmly told her parents that marriage was "off-limits" until after she finished her degree. She admitted it felt scary, but by explaining her reasons calmly, her parents eventually accepted this boundary. time, youths reported psychological benefits: increased confidence and a sense of control. One participant said, "Now I say no without feeling guilty. I honour my own limits for my well-being."

In short, setting boundaries became a form of self-love. By asserting limits, the youths were effectively saying "I value myself enough to protect myself." When participants set clear boundaries, they reported feeling more confident, empowered, and true to their values.

5.3 Positive affirmation: replacing rumination with self-compassion

After asserting their boundaries, many youths initially wrestled with self-doubt and guilt. Common thoughts were, "Did I do the right thing? Am I a bad person for refusing?" These doubts came from

overthinking and internalised guilt. To counteract this negative self-talk, participants turned to positive affirmations and self-compassion. They repeated encouraging phrases to themselves, wrote in journals, or recalled supportive messages from their Anam Caras.One participant gave a vivid example: each morning she stood in front of a mirror and told herself, “I deserve respect. My choices matter.” At first she admitted she didn’t fully believe it, but with practice her mindset changed. When a peer challenged her decision, she reminded herself, “I am doing what’s right for me.” This mantra kept her from second-guessing her decision.Across the board, youths who used affirmations reported feeling less anxious after saying no. One young man who distanced himself from a toxic friend group repeated daily: “I am strong and better off on my own than with people who hurt me.” This phrase fortified his conviction. In short, by actively affirming their worth, participants solidified their resolve and significantly reduced rumination.

5.4 “No” as a new beginning: bouncing forward into opportunities

For many participants, saying “No” was not a defeat but resulted oin bouncing for ward into a new context that brought with it new opportunities (Galllego and Chavez ,2020), For example, Participant 10 quit a toxic, overworking job. Two months later he secured a new position at a company with a healthier culture and even received a raise. He reflected that leaving the first job – as scary as it was – “opened the door to my dream career.” In this new role he thrived, illustrating how a setback can become a springboard. Another case is Participant 11, who left a long-term relationship. Though he initially felt lonely, that void became an opportunity for self-discovery. He started traveling on weekends and rekindled old friendships. Eventually he met someone new who “celebrates my dreams instead of stifling them.” He described feeling “inner freedom” for the first time in years. In his words, this journey showed him that “self-love sometimes looks like walking away – and that creates space for better things.” Some participants took these lessons outward. For instance, one youth began sharing his experience in a blog about pursuing creative passions against the odds, implicitly acting as a guide for others. In this way, personal growth sparked community ripple effects (see section 6.3 below) .

5.5 The Anam Cara as a psychological anchor

In contemporary psychological terms, an Anam Cara can be viewed as a psychological anchor: someone who offers unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1977), holds safe space, and supports the emergence of the authentic self. Young people navigating challenging social terrain often face an internal conflict between belonging and self-respect. An Anam Cara bridges this gap by embodying both connection and differentiation. They do not demand conformity, but instead invite congruence. Participants in our study often described their Anam Caras as those who "saw the real me even when I couldn’t" or who “kept me from going back to the old version of myself.” These descriptions resonate with relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 2009,) which posits that growth-fostering relationships are characterised by mutual empathy, authenticity, and empowerment. The Anam Cara becomes a living mirror - not reflecting social expectations, but revealing personal truth.

Through thematic coding, we identified four primary roles that Anam Caras played as a psychological anchor in sustaining youth choices 1:Emotional Witness: Validating the emotional cost of difficult decisions and offering empathy without agenda; 2:Moral Anchor: Providing reminders of intrinsic values and encouraging reflection on choices aligned with personal ethics; 3:Social Translator: Helping youth navigate the interpersonal consequences of their decisions, especially when those decisions disrupted

social harmony; 4:Future Mirror: offering a hopeful projection of who the individual might become if they stay on the path they've chosen. This constellation of support differentiated the Anam Cara from traditional authority figures or casual friendships. It was not about dependency but about recognition, an affirmation of the self in relation.The Anam Cara Ontology, when applied at the compassionate institutional level, points toward a compassionate model of community care - one that validates boundaries as developmental necessities rather than disciplinary issues.

5.6 Internalising the Anam Cara voice

A significant number of participants described an internalisation process. Over time, they no longer needed to seek external validation; instead, they carried the voice of their Anam Cara within. This mirrors attachment theory (Bowlby, 1967), wherein early Anam Cara relationships, fostering the attentive nurturing of creativity from the earliest years, gives the individual the opportunity to enjoy a rich and rewarding cultural life subsequently, through provision of internal working models for self-worth and creative decision-making promoting self-love. One participant shared, "I used to call my mentor after every hard conversation. Now, I just ask myself, 'What would she remind me of?' and I find my answer." This transition from relational dependence to internalised guidance is a hallmark of emotional sustainability. It suggests that Anam Cara relationships are not intended to create permanent scaffolding but to equip individuals with their own resources..

5.7 The Anam Cara and identity reconstruction

The Anam Cara also played a key role in narrative identity, helping young people reconstruct a more empowering version of themselves post-decision. Rather than framing their choice to say "No" as rebellion or avoidance, Anam Caras helped to reframe it as alignment, strength, and growth. These re-narrations served as protection against shame, especially in collectivist cultures where disobedience can feel like betrayal. This supports work in narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) where externalising ofproblems and re-authoring of stories help individuals develop resilience. In the contexts addressed in this case study, when participants could tell their story through the eyes of their Anam Cara, they often expressed greater confidence and clarity in their future decisions.

5.8 Sustainability through repetition and reflection

One of the challenges in sustaining the decision to say "no" is internal relapse: moments where guilt, doubt, or external pressure causes the individual to revoke their boundary. Here, the role of reflective self-love practices becomes evident. Affirmations, introspective journaling, and narrative rewriting help re-anchor the individual in their original decision.Moreover, as Bedi, 2024) illustrates, sustainability comes from integration - when the boundary is not a one-time effort, but a new default mode of self-regard. With each successful application, the boundary reinforces itself, becoming part of the individual's relational toolkit.While self-love supports the internal alignment needed to assert personal boundaries, emotional sustainability - the ability to continue making authentic decisions in dynamic and sometimes adversarial environments is often anchored in external relationships. The Anam Cara ontology, rooted in the Gaelic concept of a "soul friend," provides a profound relational framework that supports individuals across emotional, psychological, and systemic domains. In the context of this study, Anam Cara is not merely a poetic notion but a real-world structure through which young people sustain the decisions they make,

particularly the decision to say "No". Rather than simply offering advice, Anam Caras provided a holding space for the emotional turbulence that followed boundary-setting. This corresponds with Winnicott's (2005) notion of the "holding environment" - a safe space that allows an individual to test autonomy while being psychologically held. Through cultivating self-love in this way, young people are not only more likely to say "no" when it matters, but to say it with clarity, consistency, and care - qualities that define emotional sustainability.

6. Conclusion: Proof of sustained value

The results from our case study investigation confirm that the Anam Cara Ontology provides a deeply functional framework for emotional sustainability and the ability sustain difficult decisions, particularly in learning to say "No". Anam Caras (soul friends) successfully created a bridge between internal clarity and external consistency - anchoring the young person's evolving self in a context of positive affirmation, self-love and care. we found that all our participants had established and benefitted from interacting with Anam Caras (Soul Friends). The benefits included: supportive Anam Cara relationships as safety Nets; setting boundaries: asserting Self-Love through limits; positive affirmation: replacing Rumination with self-compassion; saying"No" as a New Beginning: enabling 'Bouncing Forward' (Jones et al 2020) towards the Opportunities that opened up through exaptation (Gallego and Chavez 2020) as a result of Anam Caras' supportive counselling activities.

Importantly, the enduring value or the Anam Cara is that it is not an elite or rare role. It can be cultivated through intentional presence, deep listening, and consistent affirmation. What matters most is not expertise, but relationship - the commitment to witness and accompany without overpowering.

6.1 Potential Anam Cara Support Arenas for bouncing forward into new contexts.

The results from this case study indicate that there should always exist possibilities for building arenas for Anam Cara support,: involving creative reconceptualisation and regeneration , located at the community level within the Anam Cara Ontology, where persons could discover themselves by exaptation of previously un-investigated resources (Gallego and Chavez, 2020) in new contexts (Brezillon Humphreys and Luk, 2026). Here, participants achieved real gains in both their emotional satisfaction and creative capabilities Within these arenas, participants would no longer be "trapped in Overthinking:" , but would be enabled to "bounce forward" (Jones et al., 2020) through such exaptation of new resources. For them, them, the arena would be experienced through constructing scenarios as a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), resulting in positive affirmation engendering self-love.

6.2 Practical Implications for Anam Cara training and development

If we are to support sustainable self-leadership among youth, especially in decision-making contexts, the Anam Cara model offers a scalable, culturally adaptable framework. It bridges the intrapersonal and interpersonal, blends ancient wisdom with modern psychology, and foregrounds the power of emotionally attuned relationships.Compassionate institutions' policy frameworks should not only fund mental health services, but actively create environments , but also support the bottom-up creation of Anam Cara Ciounselling Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2020)fostering arenas here Anam Cara-type relationships can flourish - in mentorship, in teacher training, in parent education, and in digital communities. For youth development practitioners, educators, and policymakers, the findings suggest that fostering Anam Cara-like roles can significantly enhance the emotional resilience and autonomy of young people.

Programmes that pair adolescents with trained mentors, create reflective spaces in classrooms, or train parents in emotionally attuned communication can serve to institutionalise this support structure.

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