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Tapping Into Your Inner Superhero: Positive Interventions for At-Risk Youth Organizations

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Tapping Into Your Inner Superhero: Positive Interventions for At-Risk Youth Organizations

Abstract

Childhood poverty has been linked with gaps in physical, emotional, and cognitive outcomes. Previous research sheds light on potential interventions for helping at-risk youth. We combine these findings with proven positive psychology interventions to create a curriculum for an organization serving at-risk youth in Trenton, New Jersey. The workshops are geared towards teaching components that enable lasting well-being using existing positive psychology frameworks, such as Martin Seligman's PERMA. We also adapt lessons using VIA Character Strengths and resiliency factors for an adolescent population, and leverage behavioral modeling, self-agency, and environmental mastery to create sustainable programming. If successful, these interventions may teach us how positive psychology can enable flourishing in at-risk youth populations.

Keywords

at-risk youth, poverty, positive psychology interventions, PERMA, Character Strengths, Teen, Youth Non-Profit

Disciplines

Child Psychology | Community-Based Research | Community Psychology | Counselor Education | Developmental Psychology | Education Policy | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Race and Ethnicity | School Psychology | Social Psychology | Social Psychology and Interaction | Social Welfare | Urban Studies

Tapping into your inner superhero: Positive interventions for at-risk youth organizations

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Childhood poverty has been linked with gaps in physical, emotional, and cognitive outcomes. Previous research sheds light on potential interventions for helping at-risk youth. We combine these findings with proven positive psychology interventions to create a curriculum for an organization serving at-risk youth in Trenton, New Jersey. The workshops are geared towards teaching components that enable lasting well-being using existing positive psychology frameworks, such as Martin Seligman's PERMA. We also adapt lessons using VIA Character Strengths and resiliency factors for an adolescent population, and leverage behavioral modeling, self-agency, and environmental mastery to create sustainable programming. If successful, these interventions may teach us how positive psychology can enable flourishing in at-risk youth populations.

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Background and Context

Trenton, New Jersey

Per the 2010 United States Census, Trenton has a population of 84,913 people, with 17.8% of the population between ages five and eighteen. The population is majority disadvantaged racial populations, with 50.5% Black or African American and 36.0% Hispanic or Latino, and 38.2% of households speaking a language other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Additionally, Trenton's median household income in 2017 of \$35,524 is well below the national median of \$61,372 and has a per capita income of \$18,029, contributing to a whopping 27.3% of the population living below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Furthermore, a U.S. Census study conducted between 2013-2017 estimated a high school graduation rate of only 72.0%, with only 12.2% holding a bachelor's degree or higher at age 25+.

Taken together, these statistics paint a stark picture for the underserved youth in Trenton. A meta-study of childhood poverty and life outcomes showed gaps in physical health, cognitive outcomes, school achievement, emotional and behavioral outcomes, teen pregnancy, unemployment, childhood abuse, violence, and food insufficiency (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). These results are corroborated by New Jersey's Department of Education school report for the Trenton district: 84% of students are economically disadvantaged, with less than 40% of students meeting or exceeding expectations on state English, Math, and Chronic Absenteeism standards (New Jersey School Performance Report, 2018). In many cases, the students served by Urban Promise Trenton (UPT) come from chaotic, impoverished, and sometimes traumatic environments. Not only do the students require additional learning experiences that supplement a poorly-funded and poorly-performing school system, students often need to find a supportive and

chaos-free environment in which to flourish in secondary school. Beyond high school, Trenton high school seniors need significant help with getting accepted into college, financial planning assistance, as well as preparation and support for the academic rigor of higher education.

At-Risk Youth

For the purposes of this paper, we define “at-risk youth” as underserved adolescent populations (predominantly black and Hispanic) that meet at least two of the following criteria: come from families below the poverty line, are recipients of services such as free and reduced lunch, have an incarcerated parent/guardian, or have been a part of the juvenile justice system (Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015). Unfortunately, there is no clear solution for supporting this population at present. However, there are a few encouraging strategies worth noting. De Vries et al. (2015) found that behavioral-oriented programs such as behavioral modeling yielded the best results in at-risk youth populations. Specifically, behavioral modeling as seen in mentors and teachers have made a significant difference. Martin et al. (2016) found that higher perceptions of leadership emotional support and feelings of a caring climate contributed to feelings of belonging and social responsibility, which contributed to continued participation in programs (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002). Sanders, Munford, & Liebenberg (2016) found that positive relationships with teachers protected against high risk behaviors. Importantly, they found that emotional support from teachers helped enhance resilience and positive outcomes for both the teachers and the students. Finally, they noted that programs were most effective when teachers worked respectfully with students and provided opportunities to exercise personal agency. The focus on personal agency is of particular importance as Furstenberg & Hughes (1995) found that upward socioeconomic mobility were largely due to a combination of financial and human capital, competence and self-efficacy, and institutional

resources and social networks within residential communities. Sanders et al. (2015) found that positive youth development (PYD) built resilience and enhanced well-being for at-risk youth. Services using positive youth development approaches were significantly related to higher levels of youth resilience and wellbeing.

In the context of Urban Promise Trenton (UPT), which serves at-risk adolescents, this literature holds several key ideas that are opportunities for the integration of positive psychology into the organization. UPT offers a number of robust after-school and summer programs to combat and minimize the risks due to these environmental factors (Urban Promise Trenton, 2018). However, students understandably struggle to maintain hope amidst challenges and often mistake sources of superficial or hedonic happiness as contributors to long-term well-being.

Urban Promise Trenton

Urban Promise Trenton is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2011 and operating out of Trenton, New Jersey. Their mission is to provide Trenton's underserved children, at risk youth and young adults with the skills necessary to become flourishing adults (Urban Promise Trenton, 2018). These skills include academic achievement, college attendance, life management, spiritual growth, and Christian leadership (Urban Promise Trenton, 2018). UPT provides after school enrichment programs and summer camps for about 100 first through eighth graders. Seventh and eighth graders are eligible to become junior *StreetLeaders*, which is a training program for their official *StreetLeaders* (SL) program. The SL program is targeted for Trenton high school students, many of whom become engaged with UPT through direct participation in the earlier after school and summer camp programs. UPT currently serves 17 teen mentors in this SL program. SLs participate in the development and implementation of program curriculum for younger students and serve as role models and counselors. Currently SLs

receive job training, academic learning opportunities, tutoring, leadership development, and college application, planning, preparation, and ongoing support.

UPT has many strengths, ranging from passionate leaders and educators, to interest and commitment to evidence-based research and positive psychology (Melissa Mantz, personal communication, January 25, 2019). Furthermore, UPT is creative and determined, evidenced by the variety of their current programming available. Within their free afterschool program, children receive a healthy snack and nutritious dinner. Students play, exercise, grow spiritually, and have dedicated reading and homework time with support from SLs and adult volunteers. The summer camp program, which is also free, allows students to continue to improve their academic performance, develop life skills, explore the arts, and continue their journey. Subprograms include a summer reading program, which UPT calls Literary Clubs and the UrbanTrekking program. This is an outdoor, hands-on learning and mentoring program where students paddle local rivers and complete rope courses to learn collaboration and teamwork.

High schoolers in the UPT SL program also participate within a rigorous structure that builds towards college attendance and adult flourishing. Students in the high school program participate in small reading groups, ACT/SAT exam preparations, tours of colleges, meeting early admission deadlines for in-state colleges, reading and annotating newspaper and magazine articles, and seasonal writing labs that provide context for college admission essays and personal statements. Due, in most part, to robust programming, UPT currently boasts a 100% high school graduation rate for students and high engagement, as shown by program attendees returning as SLs.

UPT identifies two potential weaknesses, or obstacles, in their implementation of new activities. First is the lack of support that many nonprofits face: lack of financial resources and

competent educators. UPT does not anticipate that this will be a problem for positive psychology efforts because funding is almost always available for new content-rich programs. Even so, we kept this in mind and ensured that positive psychology programs were created using as much free and low-cost materials as possible. A second potential weakness is resistance from students. For example, when introducing a new reading program, students were initially reluctant to additional academic work. Through role modeling from the SLs and fun interactive discussions, UPT was able to change this culture such that most students are now enthusiastic participants of the Literary Clubs. We kept this in mind as we produced the activities and prioritized that the projects maintained many fun components as well as a mentorship/role-modeling component so that students remain open and eager for the new program and contribute to the sense of belonging at UPT.

UPT's main goal for a positive psychology integration is to help students not just see but *believe* that a better future is an actual option for them despite many at-risk factors. This ranges from helping kids learn that they already possess a number of strengths, such as problem solving and navigating with few resources at home on a daily basis, to a growth mindset that helps them learn they can achieve a stable and fruitful future. Finally, UPT aimed to help students learn that fleeting pleasure and money are not truly equated with well-being, but that there are many other factors that lead to lasting well-being and happiness.

Literature Review and Application Plan

We created four related yet unique positive psychology-infused interventions that can be applied within UPT to supplement their existing programming. In discussions with UPT leadership, we decided to design the curriculum for their SLs. UPT's two summer interns have been charged with implementation of this curriculum into their 2019 summer camp. Interns will

primarily use this paper as well as ongoing support calls with the authors to ensure successful execution. The first three interventions in the curriculum are designed specifically for use with SLs and the fourth intervention is for SLs, along with UPT interns, to take what they have learned and develop an approach to teach to junior SLs and younger students. Together, these interventions create a wholesome campaign that aims to educate and promote students' long-term well-being through exploration of character strengths and resilience in an age-appropriate, tailored and accessible format and delivery. The interventions we have designed and propose for UPT are:

1. *A Lasting Well Being* workshop, a 2-part series of conversations about well-being to reshape their definition of “lasting well-being” and provide a platform for them to envision their life of flourishing;
2. *A Character Strengths* exercise that helps students identify their innate character strengths and proposes various activities in which students can celebrate and apply them in a safe and relevant context;
3. *A “Be Your Own Knight in Shining Armor”* exercise, an intervention that promotes students' resilience as they identify protective factors in their lives that act as “armor” against adversity;
4. *A Positive StreetLeaders* initiative, an empowerment exercise that allows the SLs to educate and coach positive psychology teachings to younger UPT students and junior SLs.

Lasting Well-Being Frameworks

To initiate the content and to baseline the positive psychology program we suggest beginning with frameworks for well-being. This activity was tailored towards UPT's desire to change the

conversation from momentary pleasures to long lasting well-being and happiness. In this context, we define well-being frameworks as positive psychology frameworks and components that lead to lasting happiness and flourishing.

To start preparing this program we identified sustainability is a key component, as boosts in happiness tend to erode over time due to hedonic adaptation (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014). However, it is possible to prevent adaptation in that people can keep increasing the number of positive events and emotions they experience through different activities, making those events more social, and performing gratitude-based activities (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Similarly, Diener et al (2017) supplemented the idea of objective well-being such as infant mortality rate, life expectancy, and poverty levels with the idea of subjective well-being (SWB), or people's own evaluations of their life and emotional experiences. Importantly, the team also found that while genetic heritability on happiness averaged 0.40, there was still 60% outside genetics (Nes and Roysamb, as quoted in Diener et al, 2017). Instead, individual choices can and do influence SWB. Some of those choices are outlined by Ryff (1989) in a groundbreaking work outlining self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth as the guiding principles behind lasting happiness. Other notable well-being frameworks include PERMA (Seligman, 2018), which focuses on positive affect, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement as unique pathways towards flourishing. Prilleltensky et al. (2015) offer an alternative view based on spheres of influence: interpersonal, community, occupational, physical, psychological, economic well-being (I COPPE). Finally, Haidt (2006) offers the analogy of the limbic system as an elephant and rational thought as the rider—SLs must learn to control the elephant and focus on things that bring long-term happiness rather than short-term. SLs must strive to have deep social connections, have meaningful work, and connect

to something greater than ourselves.

UPT's top leaders have shared the desire to educate their children and SLs on the true meaning of happiness, beyond fleeting pleasure and material wealth. The frameworks covered in this activity offer a starting point on what builds lasting happiness and flourishing, and how these subcomponents and domains can change due to individual choices. Of note, UPT's leaders are also interested in ensuring that their students see happiness not just as an attainable goal for others in better circumstances, but a reachable goal for themselves. As a result, leveraging the literature on the genetic and situational influences on well-being and how they can be counteracted with individual choices was of specific interest. The planned activity uses a combination of frameworks and ideas in order to illustrate paths towards well-being.

Lasting Well-Being Workshop

Beyond sustainable well-being, UPT would like students to understand that well-being isn't a fantasy that's possible only for people from privileged backgrounds, but a potential reality for the students. With that in mind and considering the well-being frameworks we highlighted in the literature review above, we propose a two-part series of conversations about well-being. Students will prepare for part one of the series by completing a one-page journal (see appendix A). The first part of the journal will be students self-reflecting on what components they believe lead to lasting well-being. In the second half of the journal, students will conduct an interview with an adult, such as a family member, guardian, or teacher who they believe is truly happy and embody wellbeing. Then, students will log the top five components that lead to lasting-well-being per their interviews. In part one of the workshop, students will compare and contrast their journals in a group discussion. The facilitator will then review formal components of positive psychology well-being frameworks with the students. For this part, the facilitator will rely

heavily on Subjective Well-Being (Diener et al., 2017), PERMA (Seligman, 2018), and I COPPE (Prilleltensky et al., 2015).

During the second part of the workshop, students will apply their learning by imagining that they are retiring and about to receive a lifetime achievement award for living a flourishing life. Students will write a one-page biography about themselves and why they won the award, which will be published in the award ceremony brochure. Students then read their biographies aloud to the class. We recommend that this intervention is provided towards the beginning of the summer program or the academic term. This is so that components that make up well-being can be used as a foundational understanding for activities throughout the semester.

Character Strengths Exercise

UPT's Program Director, Michael Lovaglio (personal communication, January 25, 2019), eloquently describes the strengths these students already have: while many people pay to have the experience of solving Escape Room puzzles, UPT's students regularly utilize problem-solving skills to rise above the daily "escape room" of their lives. This makes the VIA Character Strengths (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004) another great option for students. Character strengths are positive traits that are innate within each individual and universally valued across cultures and societies (Niemić, 2017). When applied, character strengths can have a significant positive impact, leading to increased resilience, better relationships, and enhanced health and well-being (Niemić, 2017). For example, the character strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity have a strong association with overall life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Additionally, a meta-analysis reviewing interventions and asking individuals to utilize their top strengths in a new way each day found positive impact on happiness, depression, and life satisfaction (Schutte & Malouff, 2018). Benefits of character strengths are not limited to

adults as research has shown that strengths such as gratitude, optimism, persistence, and self-regulation have a positive correlation with subjective well-being in adolescents (Gillham et al., 2011). Use of strengths that focus on others, such as teamwork, have also been shown to decrease prevalence of depressive symptoms. This is consistent with research showing that strong relationships and connectedness to others can enhance well-being (Fredrickson, 2001).

Studies of character strengths among adolescents in urban settings have focused primarily on identifying character strengths that can be used as predictors of future academic success (Seider, Gilbert, Novick & Gomez, 2013). However, an approach to foster character strengths within children to help them flourish rather than utilize strengths as predictors of future behavior is most concordant with UPT's mission. Positive interventions utilizing character strength-based exercises have been found to be impactful among adolescents when compared to groups of students who did not undergo similar exercises (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eades, & Finley, 2011). Strength-based interventions can be delivered in many formats and structures, allowing for flexibility as UPT explores potential ways to adopt and implement.

In the proposed activity students can identify their own “superpowers” and build on those foundations towards a better future, despite inevitable obstacles that will stand in their way, such as academic preparation for college and financial assistance. The purpose of this workshop will be to help UPT bring character strengths into an educational context. This curriculum is divided into three modules; recognize, appreciate and practice. In the **recognize** section the assessment will help learners understand the difference in the character strengths and what they look like in their daily lives. Sometimes character strengths can be taken for granted, in the **appreciate** section the content is aimed at helping the students understand the superpowers that lie in these character strengths. Lastly, in the **practice** section, additional activities will be presented to help

UPT to continue the conversation and deepen the positive influence character strengths can have on the lives of students. See Appendix B for a full facilitation guide for this activity.









Resilience

Since UPT's students are traditionally underserved and come from at-risk backgrounds, a program focused on building resilience and protective factors holds a lot of potential for convincing students that they can rise out of their situations and build a better future. Since resilience research originally began with at-risk children (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), this seems tailor-made to UPT's mission. Resilience is the process of bouncing back (or better) during or after significant adversity or risk (Masten et al., 2009). There are seven protective factors that may help the students build resilience and guard against adverse situations or events, the most relevant of which, for UPT, include mental agility, optimism, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. Mental agility is the ability to look at something or a situation from multiple perspectives, while optimism is the belief that things can and will change for the better (Reivich, Seligman & McBride, 2011). Since UPT would like to help their SLs create the belief that a better future is available to them, these two protective factors can help students see their situation from alternate perspectives that include good outcomes. Self-regulation is the ability to change your impulses, thinking, emotions, behaviors, and physiology, while self-efficacy is understanding your strengths and weaknesses, and having the belief that you can engage with the world in productive ways and learn from those experiences (Reivich, Seligman & McBride, 2011). These two protective factors will help address UPT's desire to help their students realize that they have many strengths already that can be leveraged to improve their life outcomes. Adopting improved use of the seven resilience protective factors could better protect the SLs from adversity and to develop resilience. These protective factors are laid out in

Exhibit 1 below and include: biology, self-awareness and self-regulation, mental agility, optimism, self-efficacy, connection, and the influence of positive institutions (Reivich, 2002).

Exhibit 1: Resilience protective factors

Details of the Resilience Protective Factors

Resilience protective factors	
 Biology	▪ Resilience is to some degree inherited from our parents (Southwick et al., 2014) but is able to be improved (Reivich & Shatte, 2003)
 Self awareness	▪ The internal and external awareness of emotions, motivations, thoughts, values, and somatics (physiology) (Southwick et al., 2014)
 Self regulation	▪ The ability to self-regulate, control impulses and act in a way that promotes wellbeing and a positive outcome (Masten et al. 2009).
 Mental agility	▪ Ability to change perspective and to think flexibly to try new approaches and change entrenched patterns of thought (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011)
 Optimism	▪ Confidence and hope that things will turn out well (Southwick & Charney, 2012)
 Self efficacy	▪ The belief we have the capacity to solve problems and have the capabilities to master the environment (Reivich & Shatte 2002).
 Connection	▪ Strong connection to others , to something larger than yourself, and a sense of belonging and social support (Gable & Gosnell, 2011)
 Positive institutions	▪ Institutions can enable and facilitate the process of navigating through adversity (Masten et al., 2009), especially when is part of organizational culture

SOURCE: Reivich, K. & Shatte, A. (2002). *The resilience factor: 7 Essential skills for overcoming life's inevitable obstacles*. New York, NY: Broadway Books

Even though resilience has biological pre-determinants, for students and SLs at UPT building resilience needs to be a deliberate and proactive process (Alvord & Grados, 2005). We can help the at-risk youth of UPT build resilience by teaching them how to be more self-aware, self-regulated, optimistic, and mentally agile (Biggins et al., 2018); by understanding and using their character strengths, and building strong relationships and support networks (Reivich, Seligman & McBride, 2011). It is a common belief, especially for youth, that adversity leads directly to undesired consequences, however, it is more often our thoughts (flowing from deeply held beliefs) that dictate the consequences that flow from adversity. To restate, the adverse event does not, in and of itself, cause negative consequences but rather it is our ability to reframe our thoughts or beliefs that will dictate whether the outcomes are positive or negative. An optimistic explanatory style, indicative of a growth mindset (open to learning new things and looking at

events from different perspectives), is a key protective factor in building resilience and will be a focus for SLs.

“Be Your Own Knight in Shining Armor” Activity

UPT students can benefit from exercises to enhance their resilience because they can teach them a healthy approach to meet and overcome adverse situations. Resilience is not about avoiding or ignoring negative events when they happen – resilience is developed by applying a set of skills that help us recognize unhelpful thinking styles and developing skills to dodge them so when adverse events occur, individuals can positively adapt (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

The “be your own knight in shining armor” activity intervention focuses on identifying and cultivating protective factors of resilience. The metaphor of being a knight in shining armor signifies the armor-like quality of protective factors as they buffer against adversity, enhancing resilience (see appendix C). The benefit of this exercise is that, like character strengths, protective factors are already a trait that we have innately within us, albeit to varying degrees. Research shows that children often learn to be resilient through past and present positive relationships, their cultural context, and the environment (Masten et al., 2009). By learning about protective factors and gaining awareness of how they play a role in their current lives, UPT students will be able to build a new toolbox of positive psychology tools that will enable them to be resilient and ultimately foster their well-being.

Positive StreetLeaders Initiative

So far, our interventions have been predominantly geared towards content for the StreetLeaders (SLs). For this intervention, we will ask SLs to partner with UPT interns to adapt the other three interventions for the younger students, starting with junior SLs and then for the general population of younger kids. This final intervention is geared towards two primary goals.

First, to provide a mechanism for the positive interventions to reach UPT's younger children and junior SLs. Second, we believe that enabling SLs to deliver this content will not only cement them as role models for the younger students but also help them better understand and apply the material to their own contexts. Our initial introduction about at-risk youth showed that behavioral modeling yielded the best results in at-risk youth populations (De Vries, Hoeve, Assink, Stams, & Asscher, 2015). Additionally, high-quality school friendships have been linked to high levels of social ability, academic achievement, well-being, and school competence (Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2007). Finally, high-quality connections characterized by mutual awareness and social-interaction are associated with better mental well-being and less misconduct (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, Hair, Moore, Garrett, Ling, & Cleveland, 2008).

In this intervention, SLs will be asked to brainstorm ways to deliver the content in an age-appropriate way to the younger students. They can use the sessions they went through as a starting point. SLs will then lead sessions with junior SLs along with program interns. After that, SLs will get feedback and make any appropriate adjustments, and lead sessions with the general population of younger students. During these sessions, adult facilitators will be present, but will largely remain silent, to build self-efficacy in SLs. Junior SLs can help in these sessions by distributing supplies, rearranging the classroom, and performing other administrative tasks to ensure the sessions run smoothly. This intervention can also be used for adult facilitators or SLs to revitalize the program for each class of students, or to adopt the interventions for other branches of Urban Promise, such as the Camden campus. See Appendix D for a facilitation guide for this intervention.

Testing the results of this positive psychology programming

To test the results of the program it will be best to examine which of the four discrete

interventions has the greatest impact on the well-being of SLs. Overall, while we describe PERMA, SWB and I COPPE in the first intervention, the Lasting Well-Being Workshop, for the purpose of testing effectiveness of the four interventions we will use the 23 question PERMA™ questionnaire (using the standard 10-point scale) as it is a good measure of flourishing, rather than life satisfaction questionnaires. We will consider adapting the wording of the questions to the population of UPT, for example some of the questions are not geared to a child/youth population. We think the PERMA questionnaire will allow us to focus on key elements of well-being and align with our education objectives. We will include the physical health questions (13 and 18) but adapt wording to the population – e.g. by asking the SLs in question 18 to compare their health to their friends. We will also consider including a question on vitality/energy levels and interests/hobbies as it will be interesting to see if the interventions have an impact on these dimensions. We will initially set a baseline PERMA score for each SL and use that as our reference point for subsequent testing. For each of the interventions we will also deploy different measures and surveys to provide useful data for comparison, for example:

1. For the Lasting Well Being workshop, we will conduct a baseline test of PERMA and use actual results to support the conversations. We will use the results to identify areas where SLs could focus moving forward;
2. For the *Character Strengths* exercise we will have all SLs conduct the VIA Strength Survey for children, however we will consider using the VIA Survey of Character Strengths if the age and sophistication of the SLs makes the child version seem inappropriate. To measure whether students understand and appreciate strengths, the facilitator could assess how many students report using their strengths regularly. To measure the effect on well-being students should take the PERMA questionnaire before

and 2 months after the first Character Strengths introduction.

3. For the “*be your own knight in shining armor*” activity, we will measure resilience using the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) and test as a baseline as we introduce this activity and then measure 3-4 months after the intervention and/or in moments of adversity (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011).
4. For the *Positive StreetLeaders* initiative, we will encourage the SLs to consider measuring their impact by using a simplified version of the measures above, set a baseline and measure impact.

We will also want to consider what impact the interventions have on overall goal attainment and success, especially given the main objective for SLs is to gain access to college-level educational opportunities. To do this we will look to test the impact of our overall program on individual goal attainment and calibrate our results against the impact of adverse family experience (as measured by a composite of 10 items). This will allow us to show the correlation of family adversity to success measures and overall well-being (as measured by PERMA) to illustrate to the SLs that they have many opportunities to succeed and to attain a robust sense of well-being. Another option to evaluate the overall goals is to compare outcomes such as college acceptance and graduation and academic success in college with SLs that received this programming versus those who graduated from the UPT program prior to the creation of this program.

Summary

Urban Promise Trenton was a thoughtful and diligent partner during the curation process. They participated in video preparation and support calls, provided feedback for each of our deliverables along the way and supplemented the implementation plan. The tailored activities,

back up by science, give our team confidence that the suggested approach will add significant value to UPT. The program delivers four interventions designed to teach UPT students about well-being, and to kickstart building their toolbox with the knowledge and skills that can enable them to flourish themselves as well as help others to flourish, thereby enhancing the well-being of the entire group. When implemented, these interventions will teach students about lasting well-being and provide them with the opportunity and the confidence to envision their future flourishing selves, sparking hope and orienting them towards a better future. Students will also learn what they inherently already possess within themselves, from character strengths to the protective factors that make them resilient. By empowering the StreetLeaders with the opportunity to share and shape these teachings for younger students, we hope to further their own learning and understanding of well-being principles that leads to further radiation and adoption UPT-wide.

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Appendix A

Lasting Well-Being Workshop

Purpose: Develop an understanding for the components that create lasting well-being. Create goals aligned to having a life of flourishing.

Description: A two-part conversation about lasting well-being. For the first part, students prepare thoughts on what they believe creates lasting well-being based on self-reflection and interviews with adults they believe are truly happy (see Part One Preparation Journal below). Over the course of an hour, students then share their thoughts and look for shared themes in the group. The adult facilitator then helps students match the identified themes with the components identified in various positive psychology frameworks (see Part One Well-Being Frameworks).

Timing: We propose doing this activity as the beginning exercise and before the *lasting well-being* and *character strengths* exercise and the final becoming a positive street leader initiative. Starting with this activity will help put the other activities in the correct context and into the higher goal of sustainable well-being.

Facilitator Guide: In part two of the workshop, students will imagine they are retiring and about to win a lifetime achievement award for living a flourishing life. Students spend 30 minutes writing the one-page biography that will describe themselves and why they won the award that will be printed on the award ceremony brochures. Students then read them aloud to one another.

Lasting Well-Being Part One Preparation Journal:

What do you think creates lasting well-being and why? Try to list 5.

<p>Spend 30 minutes interviewing an adult that you think is truly happy and represents lasting well-being. This can be a relative, teacher, or mentor. Ask them what are the top 5 things that has contributed to their lasting well-being and why.</p>

Well-Being Frameworks

Subjective Well-Being, (Diener, 2017), supplements traditional objective well-being measures (such as infant mortality rate, life expectancy, and poverty levels) with the idea of subjective well-being (SWB), or people’s own evaluations of their life and emotional experiences.

PERMA, (Seligman, 2018), offers components that lead to lasting well-being.

Positive Affect: feelings and emotions associated with happiness, such as joy, serenity, excitement, pride, gratitude, interest, amusement, inspiration, awe, relief, optimism.

Engagement: being absorbed and interested in what you are doing

Relationships: having high quality connections with people in your life: family, friends, lovers

Meaning: having purpose in your life, and seeing events as connected to your larger life story

Achievement: having a sense of goals, ambition, and accomplishing them

I COPPE, (Prilleltensky, 2015) offers domains that lead to lasting well-being.

Interpersonal: level of satisfaction in relationships that matter to you

Community: level of satisfaction with the place and people in your community, feeling like you belong and matter to your community

Occupational: level of satisfaction we get from our main occupation (paid or volunteer). To have high levels of occupational well-being, you must be organized, use your strengths, feel engaged, and feel appreciated at work.

Physical: level of satisfaction with our body, including how full of energy and vitality you feel.

Psychological: level of satisfaction we have with the conversations we have with ourselves—are we satisfied with our lives, what do others think of me, am I experiencing happiness, etc.

Economic: level of satisfaction with financial security. Research shows it's important to save for the future and spend money on memorable experiences rather than material goods. Additionally, studies show that the best way to use money to increase your well-being is to spend it on others and not yourself. We know money is important for well-being, but after a minimum level of financial security, it does not make a big difference as you gain more money.

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Appendix B

Character Strengths Exercise

Description: Deploy an activity-based curriculum to help students learn the importance of their own VIA character strengths and the power they hold for well-being.

Materials:

Strengths Definitions	https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Icons%20Classification%20Adult2_1.pdf
Abridged Character Assessment	https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Signature_Strengths_Survey.pdf
UPT Character Strengths Worksheet	 UPT Character Strength Worksheet.d

Timing: We propose doing this activity after the *Lasting Well-Being* and before the *Be Your Own Knight in Shining Armor* activity

Facilitator Guide:

Module 1 - Recognize: Help participants find their top strengths

- **Option 1 – Electronic Assessment:** Instruct the participants to take the virtual assessment here and have participants follow the prompts of the survey. Make sure they make note of their top 3-5 signature strengths.
- **Option 2 – Paper Assessment:** Instruct the participants to take the adapted paper version [here](#) (Also See Character Strengths Assessment Abridged Attached) and have participants follow the prompts of the survey. Make sure they make note of their top 3-5 signature strengths. As the facilitator helps guide students through this abridged version they can prompt the learners to think about character strengths in relation to the “Three E’s,” or

any character strength they deem *essential, energizing, easy*. Different from other types of strengths assessments, the VIA character strengths help students understand who they are as a person.

Module 2 - Appreciate: Illuminate the power of VIA character strengths.

- **Option 1 - Gallery Walk:** Place the name of each character strength on a chalkboard, or flip chart or piece of paper. If space is an issue they can be grouped by virtue (See Strengths Definitions Attached). Have the participants walk around the room and write one reason they think each strength is powerful. (I.e. if there are 17 Street Leaders there should be 17 reasons “Humor” is powerful, and “Hope” is powerful, and etc).
 - o **Debrief:** Instruct the learners to read out the answers on the board, i.e. the reason’s that their signature (or top) strengths are powerful. For any extra character strengths that have not been reported out, have the teacher or additional students read out. **Ask:** Was anyone surprised by how powerful any of these character strengths are? Was it more comfortable to talk about your own strengths or strengths that were not in your signature strengths? Does it help to see how powerful others find your strengths? Or any additional questions that spark interest.
- **Option 2 - Super Powers:** The purpose of this exercise is to illuminate how much better days and experiences can be when you understand and utilize character strengths. This activity will have the learners compare and contrast two experiences, one where no character strengths are used and another where they are able to use their strengths in every interaction. Please use the [UPT Character Strengths Worksheet](#).
 - o **To start:** The facilitator will instruct the learners to reflect on their day (or any

day). The facilitator will walk them through a regular day out loud. For example, the facilitator can have the students close their eyes and **Say** “imagine you are in your home, you wake up, you brush your teeth and you start to find your clothes and get ready for school. Now imagine, that so far, you have not been able to use your character strengths. For example, for those of you with the strength of hope, you cannot hope for a good grade on that math test, for those of you with the character strength of curiosity, you cannot wonder what you are going to learn in science class today. Now continue to imagine getting to school, sitting in classes, talking with teachers, all without being able to use your signature strengths. Imagine going home, and for those of you with the strength of kindness, not helping your sibling with their homework or not using humor to make a classmate laugh.” Instruct them to write down on their worksheet what their mood, feelings or reactions were when they were not able to use your Character Strengths? Provide some examples if they are stuck. For example, those who were not allowed to use their strength of social intelligence may feel lonely, and those who were not allowed to use humor to lighten the mood could feel annoyed.

- **Next:** Prompt them with similar instructions, but now they are asked to imagine using their strengths in every interaction. **SAY** “imagine you are in your home waking up on the same day, you brush your teeth and you head to your bedroom to get ready for school. Now imagine, that so far you have been able to use your character strengths like they were a superpower. For those of you with the strength of humor, imagine you made up jokes while you were getting ready to share with your best friend, for those of you with the strength of gratitude, you

counted your blessings before you got out of bed. Now continue to imagine the same day. You are arriving at school, sitting in classes, talking with teachers, all while being supercharged on your strengths. Imagine every class and every friend you see in the hallway and using your unique strength in every moment like a strength superhero." Instruct the students to once again write down on their worksheet what their Mood/feelings/reactions would be on the Super-Powered Character Strengths day? Provide some examples if they are stuck. For example, those who got to spread the strength of judgment could feel like a master problem solver, those of you with the strength of bravery could feel like, well, a superhero!

- **Debrief:** This debrief will try to help ensure the participants see the importance of using their strengths. **Ask:** Seeing the list of words next to each other on a worksheet, is it easy to see how different the days are? What kind of day would you like to have? What are you going to do to make sure you use your strengths every day?
- **Follow on Super Hero Activity:** Ask learners how a superhero with their unique combination of strengths would serve as a force for good in our world? For example, a superhero with two of the signature strengths, Forgiveness and Perspective, might fly around helping people see problems and conflicts through the eyes of others. Just like Wonder Woman's "Lasso of Truth" that forces people to be honest, a superhero with the strength of forgiveness may possess magical "Frames of Forgiveness" that enable the wearer to view the world through other perspectives and then experience understanding and empathy. Don't forget to give your new superhero a name worthy of their incredible strengths and powers!

Module 3 – Practice (Ongoing):

Determine how to continue to build on the superhero strengths identified in the previous lessons. The additional activities below are a combination of newly proposed activities and established ones. It is suggested for UPT to use these on an appropriate cadence and continue to create relevant activities as the concepts are embedded more deeply into the culture.

1. **Strengths Spotting in Reading Lab** – Leverage the existing Reading Lab to facilitate Strengths Spotting. The purpose of this activity is to develop “strength-sight” which will help to recognize strengths in yourself and others, it will also help students start to embed the language of strengths into their lives. During the reading lab discussions, ask the students what strengths the characters portrayed throughout the text.
2. **Strengths Survivor** – You’re stranded on a desert island with only your strengths to rely upon. List the ways your highest strengths will help you survive. Or try this game in small groups of students to talk about how your different strengths will complement each other and help you survive together!
3. **What’s on Your Happy List?** – Make a list of at least ten things that you absolutely love to do. Next, think about how your strengths are connected to these activities. Chances are the activities that you love the most are so satisfying because they provide you with the opportunity to make use of some of your highest strengths. Jot down any interesting connections you make to help you remember why you love the things you do.
4. **Lucky Strength of the Day** – Write down each of your highest strengths on a separate slip of paper. Fold the pieces so you can’t tell what they are and put them in a bowl. Pick one strength to be your “lucky strength of the day” and focus on it all day long. Look for opportunities to use it in different situations, especially concerning any challenges you

encounter. Every chance you get, ask yourself, "How can my strength of _____ help in this situation?" Make a note of any new insights you gain about this strength. Keep your jar on your desk or table and repeat this game until you've had the opportunity to focus on each of your strengths at least once. This game might also become a lifelong strengths practice for you. For a different challenge, try this game using your lesser strengths.

5. **Strengths Discussion During Difficult Moments** – Strengths can also support students during times of adversity. According to the theory of Character Strengths (Höfer, Gander, Höge & Ruch, 2019) before a time of difficulty, strengths can serve as a buffer, during the event they can help the learner reappraise the situation and after the event they can serve as a resilience function. When students are managing a difficult situation, the teacher can use the below table as a discussion guide.

Timing	Intent	Questions
Before a difficult situation	Values clarification	What are my core value/strengths that could benefit this situation?
During a difficult situation	Positive reappraisal	How might I see this problem as a challenge? How will I use my strengths right now?
After a difficult situation	Benefit finding	How did I rise up? What did I learn? How will it make me stronger? What strengths were catalyzed?

Visit this site for new activities and additional support <https://www.viacharacter.org>

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Appendix C

“Be Your Own Knight in Shining Armor” Activity

Purpose: To educate students on the protective factors that create their inner “armor” against adversity so that they can recognize and foster it to promote their own resilience.

Description: In this exercise, students will be given a two-pager worksheet, one page that serves as a reference guide to the seven resilience factors and the second page that prompts students to complete their “armor” by coloring or writing.


Timing: We propose doing this activity after the *Lasting Well-Being* and *Character Strengths* exercise, as this will build upon their understanding of lasting well-being and provide a potential point of application for them to apply their signature strengths.

Facilitator Guide:

1. Provide printed handouts to each student (1 handout per student).
2. Have the facilitator introduce the notion of a “knight in shining armor” by prompting the students, “Why do you think that knights need armor?”
 - Note: The goal of this introduction is to prime the students for the metaphor and see armor as a protectant against the potential threats of the outside world.
3. Prompt students to share aloud the many uses of armor – allow for creativity (e.g., battle, jousting, to ward off mosquitos).
4. To transition to the worksheet, pose the notion “What if I told you that each and every one of us has our own protective factors that serve as our ‘armor’ against the things that could harm us?”
5. Initiate review of the 7 Protective Factors of Resilience, referencing the sheet and highlighting each factor.

6. Ask students to provide potential examples for each one of the factors.
7. Once review is complete and understanding is established, ask students to continue to the second sheet and build their own “armor” writing or drawing examples of each of the seven protective factors in their own lives that enhance their resilience.
8. Hold open discussion after ~15-20 minutes for students to share their “armor” and discuss where they feel they have particularly strong armor (e.g., have significant displays of a certain protective factor) versus some areas where they’d like to strengthen their armor.
9. Conclude session, provide a 5-minute overview of the protective factors and summarize major points of discussion from the students.

Page 1 of participant handout

<p>The 7 PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF RESILIENCE</p>	<p>Biology</p> 	<p>Self-Awareness</p> 	<p>PROTECTIVE FACTORS ACT AS AN “ARMOR” TO PROTECT YOU FROM ADVERSE EVENTS!</p>
	<p>Connection</p> 	<p>Mastery</p> 	
	<p>Self-Regulation</p> 	<p>Positive Institutions</p> 	

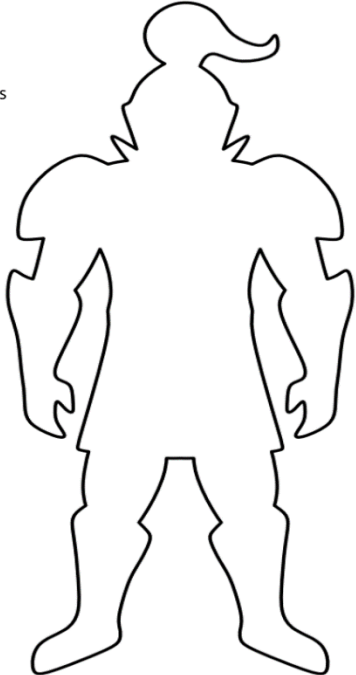
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Retrieved from Pixabay.com

Page 2 of participant handout

Be Your Own Knight In Shining Armor
Who needs Prince or Princess Charming?
In the knight on the right, write or draw examples of each of The 7 Protective Factors of Resilience that give you your "armor" against adversity.

The 7 Factors of Resilience

1. Biology
2. Self-Awareness
3. Connection
4. Self-Regulation
5. Mastery
6. Positive Institutions
7. Mental Agility



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Appendix D

Becoming Positive StreetLeaders

Purpose: Enable StreetLeaders to become Positive StreetLeaders by becoming the facilitators of these positive interventions.

Description: For each intervention, StreetLeaders will spend one hour brainstorming with each other and the summer interns that implemented the previous activities. StreetLeaders should nominate individuals for the following roles during the brainstorming meeting (see sample brainstorming meeting agenda below):

- Facilitator (ensures everyone participates and we move through the brainstorming agenda)
- Timekeeper (ensures we stay on track on the agenda by keeping a timer)
- Note-taker (takes notes on ideas from the brainstorming session and shares them with the group)

The SLs will then co-lead the intervention with a UPT Intern and deliver the content to junior SLs. After debriefing on what went well and what can be improved, the SLs will host another brainstorming meeting to adapt the intervention to the general younger kid population. The SLs will then lead the intervention with the younger kids. For these sessions, junior SLs will support them by, for example, such as handing out materials and organizing the room. Adult facilitators should be available during the session, but largely observe rather than participate in the session.

Timing: We propose doing this activity after the other three exercises as it will help create a baseline of knowledge for the SL to work from.

Sample Brainstorming Meeting Agenda:

10 minutes: SLs talk about what goals they want the intervention to have with the kids receiving

the intervention (junior SLs or general younger population).

8 minutes: Each SL writes down as many ideas as possible related to adopting the intervention for the receiving group, referencing the goals as needed.

15 minutes: SLs share their ideas with each other, popcorn style (individuals take turns shouting out ideas), adding on to their individual lists as they inspire each other

2 minutes: Each SL draws a tally mark (or asterisk) for their favorite two ideas.

10 minutes: SLs collaborate and agree on how to adapt the intervention for younger kids.

15 minutes: SLs decide on next steps and owners