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Fostering Hope and Enhancing Resilience through Character Strengths Interventions

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Abstract

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Keywords

Character strengths, resilience, hope, non-profit, positive psychology, positive interventions, well-being

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Fostering Hope and Enhancing Resilience through Character Strengths Interventions

Travis Bohn, Celeste Caton, Michelle Florin, Shondrea McCargo, Lauren Schrimmer

University of Pennsylvania

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Service Learning Project

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Introduction: The Food Project

The Food Project (TFP) works predominantly with the Southwest Baltimore community of Carrolton Ridge and extends its services to neighboring areas as well. Carrolton Ridge is a historically underserved community. The community is 75% African American, 19% White, and 6% other races ("Stats and Demographics," n.d.). The median household income in the Carrolton Ridge community is \$25,000, compared to Maryland's average of \$51,000. Most residents rent homes and receive some form of government assistance. Approximately 33% of homes in this area are vacant, and roughly 75% of the residents are either unemployed or working part-time. About 31% of the Carrolton Ridge population has not received the equivalent of a high school diploma, and of those that have, 53% do not pursue post-secondary education ("Stats and Demographics," n.d.).

TFP volunteers (personal communication, January 16, 2020) express that there are significant deficits in the community regarding the quality and availability of food, job opportunities, and resources. TFP serves as a liaison and conduit between the members of the community and the resources that support their needs. The youth who participate in TFP programs exhibit resilience, determination, and responsibility from a young age. Youth participants may be caring for siblings, contributing to the household income, or mediating conflict in their home. There are a variety of other organizations within the surrounding community whose similar mission is to provide resources to the neighborhood, including United Way of Central Maryland, Bon Secour Community Works, and Samuel F. B. Morris Community Center. However, services typically provide support for adults or family dynamics, and generally involve complicated application processes, middle persons, or stipulations for participation primarily due to the high demand for resources ("Stats and Demographics," n.d.). TFP uniquely

focuses on youth participants and their personal development and demonstrates a resource distribution model that allows for greater personalization and accessibility—although limited in its capacity for the number of people it can serve at a given time.

Analysis of The Food Project (TFP)

TFP is a grassroots organization that focuses on enhancing the Southwest Baltimore community by bringing cooking, farming, restaurant skills, job opportunities, sustainable food sources, and mentorship to the youth in the area (UEmpowerofMD, 2018). TFP gathers youth participants from the community by word of mouth and through its partnership with local schools to fulfill its mission of offering unique and varied programs to children and teenagers at their community center.

TFP programs include cooking and nutrition lessons from professional guest chefs, workshops in which participants learn skills to work in a restaurant, entrepreneurship training to teach youth how to grow and sell vegetables, and more. Additional initiatives include the “Table Talks” mentorship program in which mentors facilitate conversations around the dinner table focused on healthy relationships, coping strategies, and compassion. TFP is a local organization, and its programming is based on the needs of their specific population. Every evening, Monday through Friday, TFP hosts a “Family Dinner” in which all youth participants gather around a table and share a meal (UEmpowerofMD, 2018). On the last Sunday of every month, the youth participants manage and host a restaurant dinner at TFP, serving the community at large. This event helps to empower youth, connect the community, and foster a sense of hope. While there are many programs at TFP, there are two key themes that tie all the programs together: fostering relationships and instilling a sense of hope for the future.

TFP core staff consists of an Executive Director, Catering Director, Behavioral Therapist, and Mentoring Director. There are approximately ten consistent volunteers who help coordinate and facilitate the daily programs. The wide variety of programs creates a welcoming and enriching environment for youth participants of all ages. TFP is skilled at encouraging the youth of Southwest Baltimore to think about the future in a positive light regardless of where they come from. Our liaison, Latia Fisher (personal communication, January 16, 2020), explained that TFP “gives the children hope to see how they can get out of their tough situations” and that the youth participants’ number one strength is love. While many of the youth participants have been exposed to traumatic events, TFP is a safe place where they can engage in positive programs that encourage hope and build resilience for the future.

TFP encourages its youth participants to leverage their strengths to help others as well as themselves. For example, the restaurant development program enables youth participants to learn new skills while feeding the homeless in the community, which fosters excitement for giving back and active engagement with TFP programming. In addition to fostering a sense of hope and building resilience, we believe that understanding and intentionally leveraging the youth’s character strengths will provide a strong foundation to increase youth participant self-efficacy.

TFP and Positive Psychology

While TFP is already a positive organization with many programs, we believe there is an opportunity to enhance this by intentionally crafting a culture among the youth participants that focuses on their strengths. We propose incorporating a number of positive interventions, intentional acts or series of actions backed by scientific research carried out with awareness to increase one or many aspects of wellness (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), to further elevate the youth’s experience at TFP.

In partnership with TFP, we see an opportunity to incorporate positive interventions focused on the VIA character strengths to continue cultivating hope and building resilience skills within the youth. In order for positive interventions to be successful and effective, the activity ought to align with the participants' personality, motivation, and culture (Schueller, 2014). Lyubomirsky (2008) asserts that humans "have unique needs, interests, values, resources, and inclinations that undoubtedly predispose us to put in more effort and benefit from some strategies more than others" (p. 68). Knowing this, we carefully considered TFP's existing culture and the motivations of the staff, volunteers, and youth participants who will be engaging with these positive interventions. We also collaborated with our volunteer contact as much as possible to ensure the cultural relevance of all proposed programming. When evaluating how to best implement positive interventions with TFP, we were mindful of how our proposed evidence-based interventions relating to hope, resilience, and character strengths align with the specific culture and existing programs at TFP.

Hope, Resilience, and Character Strengths: A Review of the Literature

Hope

The definition of hope has evolved from an emotion-based focus to a cognitive-based process in which a person uses their perceptions about their capacity to achieve a result to support the steps that they take to reach their goal (Sun & Shek, 2012). Hope theory, a framework that describes a person's ability to effectively develop and implement goals based on their level of hope, was created based on a cognitive approach to hope (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). The key components of hope theory include goals, pathways, and agency (Rand & Cheavens, 2009).

Goals are the unifying force of hope theory and can be divided into two types: positive approach goals, the process of working to attain something of desire, and prevention of negative outcomes goals, precautionary goals set to avoid a less desirable state or consequence (Rand & Cheavens, 2009). Extended categories of goals include maintenance goals (our most common approach to goals in daily life) and enhancement goals (goals that challenge preconceived beliefs about what is attainable) (Snyder, 2002).

Pathways are the approaches a person takes toward the pursuit of a goal (Snyder, 2002). Individuals develop unique pathways to achieve their goals. Those with high-hope tend to find the process of determining a path more achievable because they confidently create realistic routes to achieve their goals. However, individuals with low-hope typically have negative outlooks on the future and find it difficult to think of ways to reach a desired outcome (Snyder, 2002).

Agency serves to encourage action through motivation attained from one's belief in their ability to reach a goal by adhering to their chosen pathway (Snyder, 2002). Several factors can affect a person's certainty that they can complete the task that they set out to do. For example, positive "self-talk" supports agency and is especially important when helping to identify alternative pathways for goal achievement when obstacles arise (Snyder, 2002).

Together these components determine how hopeful an individual is about their future and their ability to take action. Hope helps prevent the recurrence of problems and can enhance and support individuals' strengths (Snyder et al., 2000). Moreover, high levels of hope strongly correlate with improved academic, psychological, and social outcomes (Snyder, 2002).

There is a unique relationship between hope and at-risk communities. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) describes "at-risk" as having associations with low-

quality life outcomes such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, and stressful home environments (Pincham, 2017). Pincham (2017) explains that traumatic experiences are potentially debilitating because they encourage states of hopelessness when populations are given labels and perceived identities which they ascribe to overtime. Using a culturally relevant framework, Kids at Hope, Pincham (2017) supports a model that focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses to leverage trauma to develop hope, especially in children. The presence of a caregiver or nurturing adult who is invested in supporting and encouraging problem-solving skills and self-esteem can aid in maintaining hope during adverse experiences. Pincham (2017) theorizes that there are typically incongruences between the cultural presence of hope and the bureaucratic mandate of this concept in organizations. As an organization, TFP has established an environment that cultivates hope. We aim to implement interventions that focus on strengths to maintain and enhance hope within youth participants so that they can overcome adversities in their lives.

Resilience

Resilience is the process of coping or adapting to the adversities of life (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Adversities, or stressful life moments, can range from situations that break an individual's equilibrium to trauma or serious injury (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Reivich (2002) describes seven protective factors including emotional regulation, impulse control, empathy, optimism, causal analysis, self-efficacy, and reaching out, as components of an individual that gives them the ability to respond constructively to the challenges of life.

A majority of the youth participants at TFP are experiencing or have experienced adversities (personal communication, January 26, 2020). Fortunately, resilience can be taught through resilience training programs (Howard & Johnson, 2000, Leventhal et al., 2015).

Resilience programs can help prepare youth to not only constructively respond to difficult situations, but also to flourish (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009).

A key aspect of resilience training programs is participant assessment and development of resilience-related skills that they have control over. Through increased awareness and intentional practice using their skills, participants in these programs can increase their resilience (Alvord & Grados, 2005). The youth participants at TFP face challenges that are beyond their control. Not only is TFP a safe place the youth can gather within their own community, but its programming also serves to enhance additional protective factors.

Diverse approaches to resilience training exist. An evidence-based framework effective for adolescent girls in India includes a resilience program with twenty-three sessions in which components of protective factors are introduced to participants and applied to their individual lives (Leventhal et al., 2015). Other program models include group frameworks that bring together children, families, and community members (Alvord & Grados, 2005).

While the youth participants at TFP are resilient, they can still benefit from increased resilience to counter any challenges that they may be facing or face in the future. Our belief is that by leveraging the strengths of TFP, we can incorporate interventions focused on character strengths, to help further increase youth participant resilience, self-efficacy, and hope for the future. The following section will illustrate the benefits of character strengths interventions in building resilience and fostering a sense of hope.

Character Strengths

Character strengths are “the positive parts of your personality that impact how you think, feel, and behave” (VIA Institute, 2020). Unlike other personal strengths such as skills, talents, interests, or resources, character strengths reflect who you are at your very core. They not only

embody your true self, but they are essential to becoming your best self (VIA Institute, 2020). A person's signature strengths are their top five strengths on the VIA survey—a personal strengths assessment that measures the 24 character strengths in individuals. Signature strengths are strengths that a person “owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 18).

A number of important links between character strengths and valued outcomes have been found (Niemi, 2013). Using your character strengths can help improve relationships (Kashdan, 2017) and enhance overall well-being (Harzer, 2016). Research shows character strengths both predict resilience (Martínez-Martí, & Ruch 2017) and increase it (Niemi, 2019). Furthermore, character strengths promote well-being and buffer against psychological disorders in youth (Park, 2004). Research has shown that adolescents who receive character strengths-builder activities in their school curriculum experienced an increase in life satisfaction (Proctor, 2011). The use of character strengths programs in schools has also been correlated with higher class cohesion, relatedness, positive emotion, classroom engagement, and strengths use (Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodick, 2014). A meta-analysis on the use of signature strengths interventions suggests their potential to contribute to beneficial outcomes in various areas of life (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). Moreover, research has shown strength spotting to be effective in improving youth outcomes in terms of increased engagement and positive affect (Quinlan et al., 2014). A strengths spotting practice also supports the participants in developing and enhancing practices of love, forgiveness, and kindness which is helpful in cultivating community and supportive friendships (Haslip, Allen-Handy, & Donaldson, 2019).

TFP has a unique opportunity to implement character strengths-based interventions within their existing programming to further enhance the impact of their work. Their current

activities are a natural integration point as they are already well-received within the organization and can meaningfully support existing programming goals. These goals include supporting youth participants in developing important life skills such as coping strategies, healthy relationships, entrepreneurship, independence, employment skills, teamwork, collaborative experiences, and more.

Overall, character strengths-based interventions appear to be strong opportunities to enhance the existing programming of TFP. These programs can improve the youth participant's experience through a variety of mechanisms, including self-awareness of character strengths, mentorship and coaching through a strengths-based lens, and peer recognition to enhance community relationships and improve individual outcomes and meaning.

Based on the research, we intentionally propose programming that is responsive to the dynamic nature of TFP. Knowing youth participants frequently rotate in and out of the community center, our suggestions are simple and also have the potential to build on themselves should participants who are consistent in TFP attendance choose to engage regularly. Our design consists of five strengths-based interventions, each centered on identifying and engaging character strengths, that can all be integrated into existing TFP program infrastructure. We propose the following character strengths interventions to be integrated into TFP programming in the order listed below; it should be noted that these interventions can stand alone or they can build on one another.

Five Positive Interventions: Applying Character Strengths at TFP

Intervention #1: Take the VIA Youth Survey

Understanding one's best qualities is foundational for operating from a strengths-based perspective and is at the heart of positive psychology (Niemiec, 2017). In order to help foster a

community that recognizes and celebrates the strengths of its members, it is first and foremost important for the individuals to know and understand their own unique strengths. TFP can begin to cultivate a strengths-based culture by having each of its youth participants take the VIA Youth Survey, an online assessment tool that measures and ranks individuals' character strengths. Research has shown that simply identifying personal character strengths is a positive experience (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). TFP volunteers can encourage youth participants to take the survey during 'Table Games', the opening activities at TFP; they can also change community center computer web-browser homepages to the VIA Youth Survey website to further motivate participants to engage with the survey. In the circumstance that TFP is unable to access the survey online, a list of character strengths with descriptions can be used to help the youth participants identify their own strengths (Appendix G). The youth can begin by reviewing the list with definitions and then circling the top five that they feel best describes who they are. The remaining interventions will build upon the foundation of understanding one's own character strengths. See Appendix A for more details.

Intervention #2: Create a character strengths wall art installation

We propose integrating character strengths into the physical structure of TFP through a positive psychology character strengths art installation. The opportunity to build a physical character strengths wall display is a unique intervention that focuses on establishing the common language and awareness of character strengths within the community. It aims to spur organic conversations around character strengths concepts—serving as a lasting, yet low-lift integration and introduction to these topics. The physical installation of the character strengths wall would display basic introductory information about character strengths in a prominent place within the TFP space. The information would include the explanation and definition of character strengths

in language that is culturally relevant, a chart (possibly a large poster or canvas) featuring the list of all 24 character strengths, explanations and examples of those strengths, and their respective symbols (Appendix G). We propose including a section of the wall that has an activities slot or conversation prompt; this section could be modular, allowing it to be easily replaced monthly with a new activity/prompt to continue encouraging engagement with this information. In this way, the wall could meaningfully establish a common language around strengths. Having a common language accessible to all enables community members to be “on the same page” throughout future interactions and can be a powerful tool for enhancing community interaction, communication, and self-knowledge (Niemic, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, character strengths knowledge and practices are communal—a common goodness through which we can meaningfully engage with others (Fowers, 2005). Having a strengths wall continues to generate opportunities for dialogue around character strengths. In order to support the integration of character strengths, part of the wall installation will incorporate simple handouts featuring an overview of character strengths concepts to help facilitators understand the benefits of character strengths.

What is particularly notable about this intervention is how simple, yet widely accessible it is. It will not require constant maintenance unless TFP wants to change it frequently (in which case a modular build-out will streamline this) and does not require a facilitator. It is also an unobtrusive intervention, allowing each TFP participant to engage with this material if and when they feel like it. See Appendix B for more details.

Intervention #3: Implement strengths spotting during “Table Talks” mentorship program

Surfacing character strengths discussions during the weekly “Table Talks” mentorship program to highlight and develop character strengths will help TFP to nurture an environment in

which the youth participants feel comfortable and confident talking about their strengths. This intervention involves creating a curriculum of conversation questions aimed at encouraging youth participants to discuss character strengths during the “Table Talks” sessions. Having an opportunity to recognize the strengths in others through *strength-spotting* creates space for use of a character strengths-based intervention within a relational setting (Niemic, 2017).

The “Table Talks” strength-spotting intervention involves *labeling*, *explaining*, and *appreciating* the character strengths of the youth participants (Niemic, 2017). *Labeling* is the practice of directly naming the character strength of another person, *explaining* describes what the strength is and how it is demonstrated, and *appreciating* affirms that character strength by articulating why the strength is meaningful (Niemic, 2017). This process can be simply taught to mentors and practiced within the context of the “Table Talks” sessions.

It is essential that the “Table Talks” mentor (who would be the “strength-spotter”) is familiar with both the concept and language of character strengths, ensuring that they can appropriately recognize and celebrate strengths within the youth participants. It is also important that the “strength-spotter” has keen observational and listening skills so that they effectively recognize verbal and non-verbal displays of a person’s strengths. The newness of the strength-spotting exercise may create initial discomfort for youth participants but can grow to become more normal over time as participants gain familiarity with the exercise. Visit Appendix C for more details.

Intervention #4: Integrate character strengths “shout outs” into daily closing activities

There is an existing TFP closing activity that aims to end the day with intention, which could be a well-structured opportunity to introduce a character strengths intervention. This programming further enhances a supportive and uplifting close to the day by focusing on how

individuals can be recognized for the use of their strengths within the community. This activity would be facilitated by the group leaders, TFP volunteers, who already lead daily closing activities for TFP. The intervention is a simple ten-minute activity where facilitators and peers give shout-outs to members of the community—recognizing displays and uses of specific character strengths from the day. Prompts will be made available to the facilitator ahead of time to ensure the conversation is directed towards what is best about the community and its members.

The goal of this activity is to increase well-being through a few concurring mechanisms: the elimination of strengths blindness, enhanced community recognition and friendship through peer shout-outs, and ultimately, empowerment of the youth participants of TFP through this recognition. Research has shown strength spotting in similar settings to be effective in improving youth outcomes in terms of increased classroom engagement, an increase in positive affect, and higher need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Quinlan, Vella-Brodrick, Gray, & Swain, 2018). This intervention could enable a pathway for individuals to be recognized for how their unique character strengths are celebrated at TFP, and to close the day's activities on a positive note. See appendix D for more details.

Intervention #5: Align tasks during restaurant (and other job training) programming with youth participant character strengths

TFP can embed character strengths into their TFP job and skills training programs through a strengths alignment intervention. The activity, designed by Hadassah Littman-Ovadia and Ryan Niemiec (2017), consists of taking an individual's top five work tasks and the top five character strengths and aligning the tasks with the strengths to show how a strength can be used to complete each of the tasks (Niemiec, 2017). The strengths alignment activity can be used

within the existing programming at TFP. There are a variety of tasks that youth participants complete at TFP and the activity can be carried out as a way to reflect on the tasks that are to be completed.

The primary example that we have identified for the application of this activity is within the monthly restaurant. Each youth participant has a task that they carry out in order for the restaurant to function. Prior to the Sunday restaurant dinner, youth participants can take their strengths and align them with the tasks they are expected to complete at the restaurant. Youth participants will be guided in aligning their strengths with specific tasks. The volunteer facilitator can draw a real-world connection by emphasizing that this activity is something the youth can do before other tasks they carry out in a future job. Whether it is part of the monthly restaurant or other programming at TFP, there is an opportunity for the activity to be incorporated.

In carrying out the intervention there is an opportunity for the youth participants to become more engaged in the activities themselves while also learning about how to apply their strengths in a tangible way. Research shows that incorporating strengths into work tasks is beneficial for developing calling (Harzer & Ruch, 2012), motivation (Gander et al., 2012), well-being (Hone et al., 2015), and performance (Dubreuil, Forest, & Courcy, 2013). The intervention can go beyond specific work tasks and can include any activity or task that an individual carries out (Niemic, 2017). See Appendix E for more details.

Summary & Limitations

Our proposed interventions are designed to meet TFP staff, volunteers, and youth participants where they are. The order of the interventions is curated to first provide a character strengths foundation at TFP before diving into more robust interventions that may take more time and effort. However, these five interventions can also stand on their own. It is crucial to

consider how the interventions connect to existing programming at TFP. Additionally, we believe that by offering various opportunities for youth participants to take part in character strength interventions, TFP will increase awareness of character strengths within individuals and across the community. Our hope is that by implementing multiple interventions during existing programs, we can help TFP continue to thrive as a positive organization and foster resilience and hope in the community.

While our proposed interventions are research-informed, there are some limitations when generalizing the findings of scientific studies and applying the interventions in the real world. Much of the research conducted on character strengths use white, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic participants. The youth participants at TFP come from diverse backgrounds, and concepts and language used in the interventions must be adjusted accordingly. Changes to the interventions may result in reduced impact. Additionally, the ever-changing group of youth participants may make it difficult to track individual progress over time. It will be easiest to measure volunteer compliance and the number of youth participants that partake in the character strengths positive interventions. Because youth participants may or may not visit TFP regularly, it may be challenging to understand which changes are due to the character strengths interventions. Moreover, it may be difficult to train volunteers and youth participant “strength spotters” because the population is constantly shifting. To combat this, our character strengths resources (see Appendix) are stand-alone documents that can be distributed to any volunteer or youth participant who wishes to participate in the interventions described above. Finally, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the future landscape of TFP is unpredictable at this time which may impact the specific temporal relevance of this programming. Despite this, we believe that these

strengths-based interventions will remain, or quickly become relevant to the organization and its youth participants again.

Appendix A

Intervention #1: Take VIA Survey for Youth

Purpose: Assess character strengths; develop an awareness of one's strongest qualities; cultivate familiarity with the language of character strengths.

Description: The VIA Youth Survey is intended to help youth (ages 10-17) increase awareness and understanding of their character strengths. The survey is taken online and produces individual results immediately upon completion of the questions.

Location: The Food Project; computer access needed (use shared computers at TFP)

Timing: 30 minutes (preferably occurs during opening activities or "Table Games")

Process:

Step 1: Go to the VIA institute website (<http://www.viacharacter.org>). Select VIA Youth Survey, take the free survey. Note: the VIA Youth Survey is for ages 10-17. Youth under the age of 13 will need parental consent before they can take the test.

Step 2: After completing the survey, you will receive a rank order of your character strengths, with definitions.

Step 3: Notice what captures your attention about your results. What are your first reactions? Do any questions or insights come up for you?

Measurement of success: This will be successful if after completing the survey, the youth are able to identify their character strengths and demonstrate an understanding of what this means.

This will be unsuccessful if, after taking the survey, the youth participants do not have an increased understanding of their character strengths or view their strengths as weaknesses. An increased awareness could be evaluated in simple ways, such as ease and speed of recalling

personal signature strengths. To measure success, TFP volunteers can ask the participants to talk about their character strengths to determine if an understanding of strengths has been established.

Appendix B

Intervention #2: Character Strengths Wall Installation

Purpose: Cultivate familiarity with the concept and language of character strengths. Provide resources for multiple learning styles/preferences for engagement by building a character strengths visual that can be accessed by everyone at TFP. Develop a common language. Enhance communication.

Description: A physical decoration of a wall at TFP displaying information about what character strengths are (definition and explanation), a list of all twenty-four strengths, explanations and examples of those strengths (see Appendix G). Potential to have a section of the wall with activities or conversation prompts; this section could be modular and replaced on a monthly cadence if engaged with regularly.

Quantity: 1

Location: The Food Project

Timing: One-time installation, roughly 3 hours, activities could be changed monthly.

Process:

Step 1: Decide upon a space that is visited regularly within TFP.

Step 2: Gather key information on character strengths (also provided within this document, see Appendix G or visit <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-via> for more information).

Step 3: Design/print out character strengths materials.

Step 4: Paste materials onto a TFP wall.

Step 5: *Optional*. Update the “conversation section” monthly if desired.

Measurement of success: This will be successful if the installation remains visible and accessible over time. Success will be evident if youth participants demonstrate active

understanding and use of character strengths as measured by time spent in front of the installation or number of times the topic is mentioned amongst TFP participants during daily communication. Another measure of success will be increased well-being of participants and volunteers from increased knowledge and engagement with their personal strengths. Finally, incorporating character strength teaching into the volunteer on-boarding process or other processes would indicate that the strength wall is successful at normalizing the discussion and application of strengths. This will be unsuccessful if the wall is never posted, and/or if it is constantly ignored and nobody engages with the information it is presenting.

Appendix C

Intervention #3: Implement strengths spotting during “Table Talks” mentorship program

Purpose: Help youth participants understand and identify character strengths in self and others in order to increase wellbeing.

Description: During the “Table Talks” mentorship sessions, mentors and youth participants will engage in meaningful conversations about character strengths. Over the course of this intervention, mentors will teach the definition and characteristics of the 24 different VIA character strengths and model ways to identify them in self and others (strength-spotting). Mentors will then guide youth participants in “strength spotting” in others. The “strength spotter” will follow the conversational format of labeling, explaining, and appreciating the strengths of other youth participants. Mentors and youth participants are encouraged to actively engage in this process outside of “Table Talks.”

Location: The Food Project; “Table Talks” Mentorship Program

Timing: At the end of the “Table Talks” mentorship sessions which occur weekly. This intervention will take place over the final 30 minutes of the session; “Table Talks” sessions run for 8 weeks.

Process:

Step 1: Become familiar with character strengths language and relevance to the community. To gather key information on character strengths see Appendix G or visit

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-via> for more information

Step 2: Discuss character strengths and their characteristics - Labeling

Step 3: Discuss & practice explaining strengths in depth - Explaining

Step 4: Discuss appreciating the character strengths in others - Appreciating

Step 5: Practice labeling, explaining, & appreciating character strengths in others

Measurement of success: This will be successful if mentors are continuing to engage in this conversation over the full span of the 8 weeks and youth participants are able to identify and describe different character strengths. This will be unsuccessful if mentors have not implemented this over time and youth participants do not know any of the character strengths or how to identify them by their characteristics.

Appendix D

Intervention #4: Implement character strengths “shout outs” during daily closing activities

Purpose: Increase well-being through the elimination of strengths blindness, enhanced community recognition and friendship through peer shout-outs, and ultimately, empowerment of the youth participants of TFP through this recognition of character strengths on display.

Description: A 10-minute programmatic addition to existing closing day activities, led by the group facilitator, a TFP volunteer. Facilitators guide the group in a peer to peer “shout-outs” session to members of the community—directly calling out and recognizing displays and uses of specific character strengths from the day.

Quantity: 1x per closing activity, daily.

Location: The Food Project

Timing: 10 minutes

Process:

Step 1: Facilitator selects a 10-minute period within TFP closing activities period

Step 2: Facilitator informs the group that it is time to recognize peers for their displays of character strengths from that day

Step 3: Facilitator kicks off the program by starting the first shout out, starting with one individual specifically

Step 4: Facilitator allows other participants to engage

Step 5: Repeat per group member, ensuring each individual is recognized for their strengths each day

Measurement of success: This will be successful if each participant hears positive feedback about their displays of character strengths. This will be successful if the activity is completed

daily. This will not be successful if participants make fun of the exercise and/or if the activity is not completed at all.

Appendix E

Align tasks during restaurant (and other job training) programming with participant character strengths

Purpose: To learn how to apply strengths to carry out specific tasks, which as a result can increase engagement and meaning in the tasks.

Description: The strengths alignments intervention takes a list of existing tasks that a youth participant is about to complete and aligns their strengths with the tasks, identifying specific ways in which they can use their strengths to carry out their tasks. There are many ways in which strengths can be used to carry out a task and it may take creative thinking to complete this.

Location: The Food Project

Timing: This will take place in advance of the tasks that are being considered to complete. For example, before carrying out necessary tasks for the Sunday restaurant dinner at TFP.

Process:

TFP volunteer walks the youth participant through the following steps using the worksheet (Appendix F) provided in this document as a guide

Step 1: The youth participant writes down 5 tasks

Step 2: The youth participant write down his/her top 5 character strengths

Step 3: The youth participant writes a statement illustrating how he/she can use all five strengths to complete a task

Step 4: Complete for all five character strengths

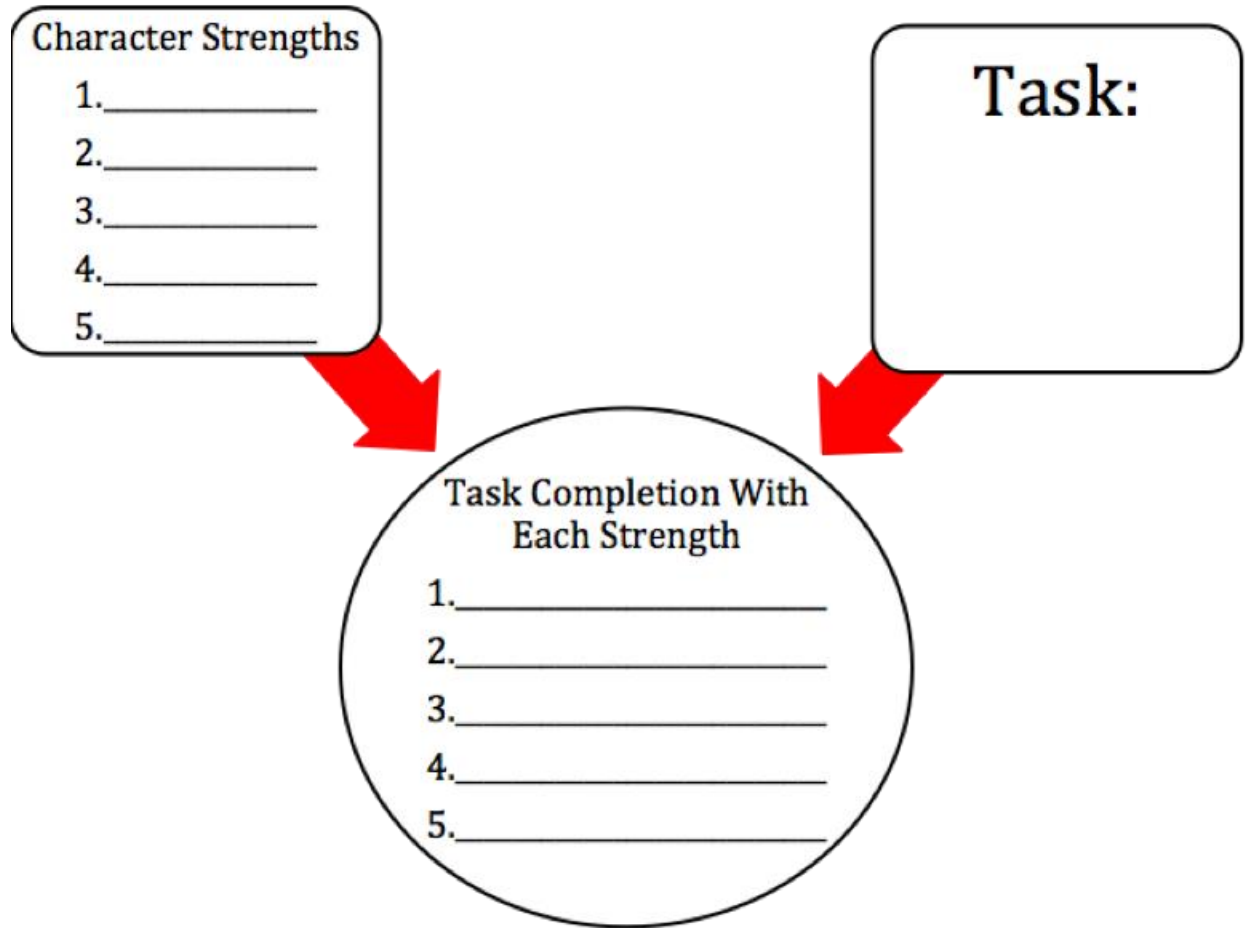
Measurement of success: This will be successful if youth participants complete the activity and effectively note how they used strengths in a given task. This will be unsuccessful if youth

participants are not able to complete the activity and/or if they do not utilize the activity for completing tasks at TFP.

Appendix F

Strengths/Task Alignment Worksheet

Name: _____



Appendix G

Character Strengths Guide

CHARACTER STRENGTH	Other ways to describe this strength:	"I statements"
Appreciation of Beauty	Awe, wonder, admiration	<i>"I see and appreciate the beauty around me and the skills of other people."</i>
Bravery	Courage, daring, fearlessness	<i>"I face my challenges and difficulties, even though I might be afraid."</i>
Creativity	Cleverness, imagination, originality	<i>"I am creative, I come up with new ideas."</i>
Curiosity	Interest, eagerness, openness	<i>"I seek out new experiences and activities."</i>
Fairness	Equality, honesty	<i>"I treat everyone equally and fairly, and give everyone the same chance."</i>
Forgiveness	Compassion, pardon, mercy	<i>"I forgive others when they upset me and/or when they treat me badly."</i>
Gratitude	Thankful, appreciation, grateful	<i>"I am grateful for many things and I express thanks to others."</i>
Honesty	Fairness, honor, integrity	<i>"I am honest to myself and to others, and I take responsibility for my actions."</i>
Hope	Wish, believe, expect	<i>"I am realistic and optimistic about the future. I believe in my abilities and that things will turn out well."</i>
Humility	Modesty, humble	<i>"I see my strengths and talents but I am humble. I do not try to be the center of attention or to receive recognition."</i>
Humor	Amusing, witty	<i>"I approach life playfully, making others laugh. I find humor in difficult and stressful times."</i>
Judgement	Awareness, perception, critical thinking	<i>"I consider all perspectives when making decisions, including those that are different from my own."</i>
Kindness	Friendly, considerate, generosity	<i>"I am helpful and regularly do nice favors for others without expecting anything in return."</i>
Leadership	Lead, direction, management	<i>"I take charge and guide groups towards goals, and make sure group members get along."</i>
Love	Caring, comforting, accepting	<i>"I experience close, loving relationships that are warm, and caring."</i>
Love of Learning	Interest, engagement, curious	<i>"I enjoy learning new things and seek to learn something new often."</i>
Perseverance	Persistence, dedication	<i>"I keep moving toward my goals even though there are challenges and disappointments."</i>
Perspective	Seeing the bigger picture/different views	<i>"I consider different perspectives and use my own experiences and knowledge to see the big picture."</i>
Prudence	Wisdom, judgment, cautious	<i>"I act carefully and cautiously. I try to avoid unnecessary risks."</i>
Self-Regulation	Self-control, discipline	<i>"I manage my feelings and actions and am self-controlled."</i>
Social Intelligence	Understanding yourself and others	<i>"I am aware of and understand my feelings and thoughts, as well as the feelings of those around me."</i>
Spirituality	Sense of purpose and/or meaning in life	<i>"I believe in a sense of purpose or meaning in my life; and I see my place in the big picture of the universe."</i>
Teamwork	Collaboration,	<i>"I am a helpful and contributing group and team member, and feel responsible for helping the team do what it needs to do."</i>
Zest	Enthusiasm, energy, vigor	<i>"I feel full of energy. I approach life with enthusiasm."</i>

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