



Character Does Matter Youth Impact Report

February 2020



PT I: TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION'S CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM

Introduction to Travis Manion Foundation

The work of Travis Manion Foundation (TMF) is rooted in the belief that veterans and families of the fallen are among America's greatest civic assets, and that the path toward bridging the civilian-military divide and uniting our communities begins by empowering our military community. Our vision is to create a unified and supportive community, inspired by our nation's service members, where individuals hone their character to serve a purpose higher than themselves.

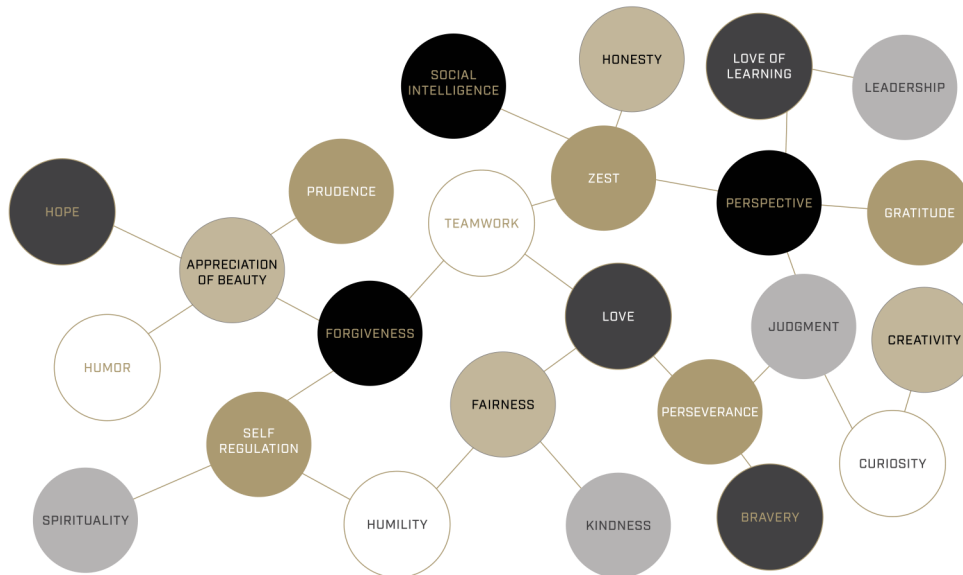
To achieve this, TMF trains, develops, and highlights the role models that lead these communities. We design programs, training opportunities, and events that invest in and empower veterans and families of the fallen by helping them to identify their personal character strengths. Armed with this knowledge, they pass on their values to the next generation, and serve and connect with the greater community.

The hallmark initiative of Travis Manion Foundation is called Character Does Matter (CDM). This program empowers veterans and families of the fallen to draw on their own personal experiences to mentor youth aged 12-18 in a wide range of settings. Mentors deliver our proprietary character development curriculum focused on helping youth adopt the "If Not Me, Then Who..." mantra.

Overview of the Character Does Matter Program

The goal of the Character Does Matter program is to provide middle- and high school-aged youth with positive role models from the military community. These Veteran Mentors guide the youth in identifying their personal, individualized character strengths, and then empower them to activate those strengths by connecting with and serving others.

The curriculum of Character Does Matter is grounded in the evidence-based research field of Positive Psychology, and the 24 character traits adapted from the Values-in-Action Classification of strengths.¹ The program's curriculum includes lecture, discussion, group activities, and community service.



¹According to *Psychology Today*, "Positive Psychology focuses on the character strengths and behaviors that allow individuals to build a life of meaning and purpose—to move beyond surviving to flourishing." As an important feature of this field, the Values-in-Action (VIA) Survey is a classification of 24 character strengths that was developed by Drs. Seligman and Peterson and published in the work, *Character Strengths and Virtues: a Handbook and Classification*.



The components of Character Does Matter include:

- **Presentations:** 40-minute, lecture-style presentation to a group of youth led by a trained Veteran Mentor; introduces youth to the concept of character as a strength to be built upon as well as the “If Not Me, Then Who...” ethos of TMF; discusses four individual character strengths at length and provides a demonstrative story for each; challenges them to exercise strengths to serve others.
- **Character & Leadership Courses:** includes a minimum of 8 hours of instruction led by Veteran Mentors to a small group of youth; curriculum includes lesson plans that focus on small group discussion around the character strengths, personal sharing of stories to model or reflect on the strengths, and group activities that require use of the strengths. The culmination is a youth-led service project to put character into action.

All Character & Leadership Courses initiate with a presentation, though many presentations are offered as a standalone delivery. TMF staff delivers the training to Veteran Mentors to prepare them to administer the above curriculum, and completes proper background checks and vetting practices when selecting these Veteran Mentors. After selection, training includes a minimum of 4 initial hours of support, as well as regular check-ins and site visits from TMF staff to the Character Does Matter classroom.

Character Does Matter Milestones:

- TMF staff has trained and currently supports 1,550 Veteran Mentors.
- In 2019, 39,000 students completed the Character Does Matter program; since inception, more than 317,000 students have gone through it.
- Veteran Mentors delivered 244 character presentations in 2019.
- Veteran Mentors have delivered 82 Character & Leadership Courses in 2019, resulting in approximately 1,000 mentoring hours with youth.





Pt II: PROGRAM EVALUATION & RESEARCH OF THE CDM PROGRAM

Partnership with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families

In August 2018, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) began an evaluation of the CDM program. The evaluation measured the impact of TMF’s character and leadership education for youth and identified factors that contributed to participant success. IVMF selected six sites throughout the country that each held a Character & Leadership Course and began collecting data and survey reports in Summer 2018, and concluded their research in April 2019. The primary finding of IVMF’s pilot research was stated as follows:

TMF’S CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM) program has a positive effect on young adults’ attitudes toward both positive and negative behaviors. Preliminary findings show that school-aged young adults who participated in a CDM program indicated a significant increase in caring, educational expectations, and pro-social attitudes. Similarly, they showed greater negative attitudes toward risky behaviors, such as drinking and the use of drugs.

Following the pilot research and initial findings, and after TMF implemented recommended changes to improve impact on students, the IVMF returned to do a more in-depth evaluation of the Character Does Matter program in September 2019. Their study will include a rigorous analysis of additional school sites, continuing until June 2020—a full school year.

While this research is ongoing, the below information represents a mid-year report supplied by the IVMF, to include short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of the Character Does Matter program.

Short-Term Impact: Character Presentations

After receiving a 40-minute presentation led by a Veteran Mentor, youth were asked to complete a short survey to determine which attitudes and behaviors may have been altered as a result of the presentation.

They were given different versions of the survey, which included two short questions and an open-response section. Below are the results of the survey from 171 youth at six different presentations:

Because of this Presentation:	YES	MAYBE	NO
I will be more motivated to help others	95.4%	3.4%	1.1%
I will be more compassionate and kind	86.2%	13.8%	0.0%
I will think more about how my actions affect others	76.2%	20.2%	3.6%
I will be more likely to do something when I see someone being bullied, threatened, or harassed	86.9%	10.7%	2.4%



Sample Open Responses from Students:

- I want to be responsible and take action when needed. I want to help people when I'm capable.
- I will start volunteering for more things to help out people and the environment, because, "If Not Me, Then Who..."
- Presentations like these inspire me to start volunteering when I can. I might start to volunteer at the food bank or another organization that I know actually completes their goals.
- I intend to take this into consideration and think about how other people may feel before I do something.
- I want to achieve my goal to study more and to pay attention and be a great person in life.
- I want to focus, believe in myself, and motivate others to do better, be themselves and keep doing good.
- I will motivate myself to be a better version of myself.
- I want to work toward having better character. And expand on some of the character traits that I already have.
- I will do more to help my community and help my peers because, "If Not Me, Then Who..."

The presentation encourages youth to reflect on their current behaviors and improve their future behaviors and attitudes. Results of the survey suggest that youth who experience a character presentation enjoy a fresh commitment to service, living with character, assisting others, and achieving personal goals.





Mid-Term Impact: Character & Leadership Courses

Presentations offer a strong initial touchpoint with Veteran Mentors that is then deepened when youth participate in a Character & Leadership Course. During the course, students build relationships with their Veteran Mentors and, through the course curriculum, become more knowledgeable on their individual strengths and how to best exercise them to serve others.

The below data, provided by IVMF, takes a look at two different schools before, during, and immediately after a course, and examines impact from different lenses, including perspectives from teachers, administrators, and the youth themselves.

Mid-Term Impact Example 1: New Brunswick High School (NJ)

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

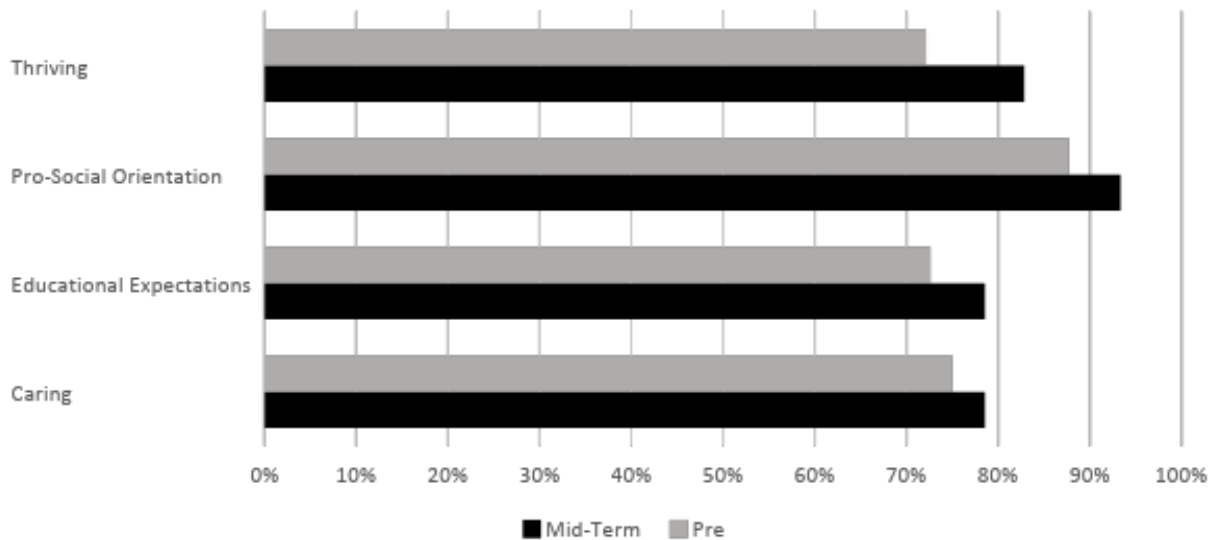
Student Body Size: 1,845

Demographics: 87% Hispanic, 13% African American

Character & Leadership Course: 10 sessions

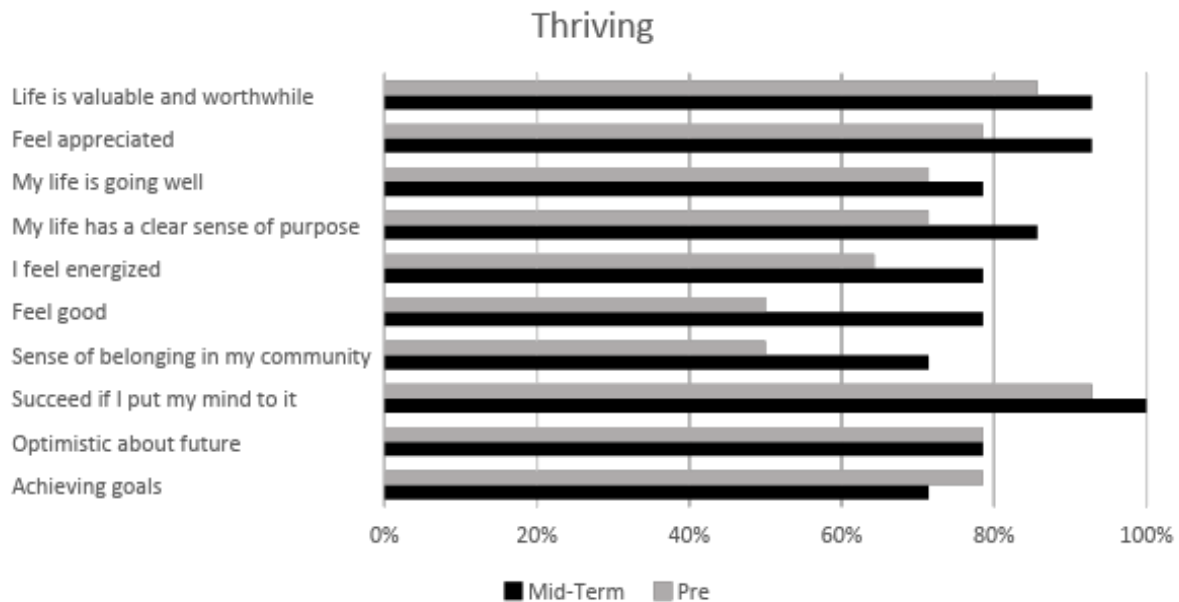
STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

Youth that participated in CDM at New Brunswick High School reported higher levels in all categories studied, which include Thriving, Pro-Social Orientation, Educational Expectations, and Caring.





Youth at New Brunswick High School further defined how their level of Thriving improved by demonstrating it, most notably, with feelings of being able to succeed, that life is valuable and worthwhile, and of being appreciated.



COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS

From Written Survey:

“What appealed to me was one giving back and given back to the community. They don’t focus on college prep, but that no matter who you are and where you come from, you can give back.”

“When they visit the Veteran’s home (for their service project), seeing their faces has been amazing. It can be intimidating at first, but then they don’t want to leave. They see the Vets are members of the society that deserve more appreciation.”

From Interview with IVMF Staff:

The liaison noted that some of the youth participants aren’t usually vocal, but in the program they have a voice, which she felt was very important.



Mid-Term Impact Example 2: West Potomac High School (VA)

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Student Body Size: 2,300

Demographics: 38.65% Caucasian, 34.76 Hispanic,
16.31% African American, 6.75% Asian, 3.53% other

Character & Leadership Course: 45 students per session, 3 cohorts

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

Surveys were conducted at the start of the program and at its conclusion to measure any changes in attitudes and behaviors toward factors that contribute to overall youth success.

Results showed that following the Character & Leadership Course, student levels of Caring, Pro-Social Orientation and Thriving all increased. The most significant difference was felt in Caring, which increased by .12 points on a 5-point scale.

Scale	N	Mean		Difference Post - Pre
		Pre	Post	
Caring	13	4.17	4.29	.12
Pro-social	13	3.45	3.51	.06
Thrive	13	3.85	3.95	.10





Sample Open Responses from Students:

- This course allows me to reflect on my character and the impact I have on my community.
- It inspires me to stand my ground and be more active in my community.
- If everyone in this school did what we learned in TMF, then the school would be a better place.
- This makes our school a better and cleaner place.
- It showed me a lot more about other people's feelings and my own, and how to open up and stand up for myself.
- The activities and conversations we have make me think deeper into things. It's shaping the students in our school to be leaders.
- [The Veteran Mentors] help identify and show leadership qualities and strengthen leadership qualities.
- TMF has encouraged me to be better. It makes our school more positive, one person at a time, at these meetings.

Immediate survey results from the Character & Leadership Courses indicate overall improvements in youth's thriving measures, including their sense of gratitude, self-confidence, educational expectations, critical thinking and optimism about the future.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS

In the weeks following their work with Veteran Mentors, teachers reported students worked to apply their training by creating initiatives that both unite the student body and serve their community. They established a day dedicated to service, as well as a club to expand their mission to the larger student population.

"I think the biggest impact I have seen is on our student leaders – they are more inspired and motivated to make change and inspire change in others. They are very conscious of service opportunities and have now established a tradition on Veterans Day to dedicate acts of service to making their school a better place. The students have (also) started a TMF club and are invested in spreading the 'If Not Me, Then Who...' mantra throughout the student body and building the character of all students with workshops and training."

- English Teacher, WPHS



Long-Term Impact: Building Assets Through Character Does Matter

Initial findings suggest that the presentations inspire good intentions and attitudes in youth, and Character & Leadership courses immediately help realize those intentions and improve behaviors that lead to student success. The most important outcome of CDM, however, is the long-term impact it has on youth and school culture.

IVMF's research that began in August 2018 gestures at these long-term outcomes, but still only scratches the surface of what's possible with the CDM program. When it is delivered over time for several years at a school, it can begin to influence and shape the school's culture and the youth it ultimately produces.

The true power of CDM is the way in which it builds civic assets, and not simply influences short-term intentions or initial behaviors in participants. These assets then go on to influence one another, future youth, and their entire school and community as a result of what they have learned in the program and how the Veteran Mentors have helped them to identify and develop their character strengths.

To investigate these long-term outcomes and the way in which the CDM program builds assets, our team conducted a study of our longest-standing program at any high school:

St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia, PA.

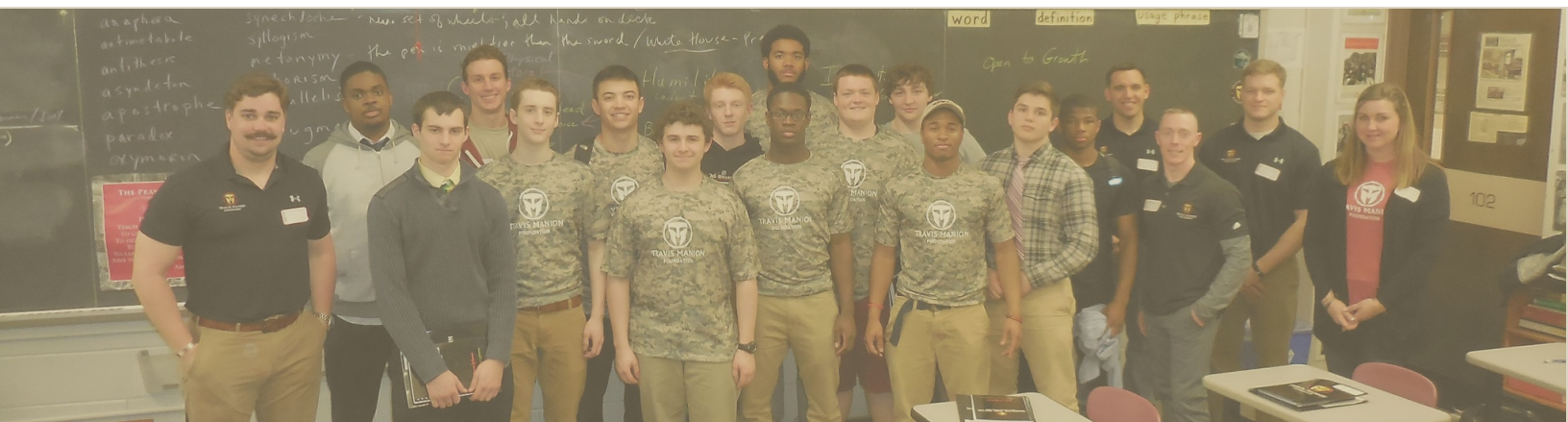
SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Student Body Size: 890

Demographics: 83.6% Caucasian, 9.0% African American, 2.5% Multi-Cultural, 2.2% Asian, 1.7% Hispanic

Character & Leadership Course: 30 students, 8 sessions; occurs twice per year

TMF held our very first Character & Leadership Course at St. Joe's Prep in Fall 2014 led by a team of five Veteran Mentors. Since that time, Mentors have conducted 11 semester-long cohorts and more than 200 youth have graduated from the program. In Spring 2015, participants who had completed the program by that time came together to form an alumni club to create connection between former, current, and future graduates of the CDM program and to continue in practice what they had learned from their Veteran Mentors. The club was named "the TMF Hawks" and participants crafted their mission to "catalyze the application of leadership through service in every student at St. Joe's Prep." They meet each week after school for approximately one hour.





The purpose of the club, as outlined by members, is twofold:

1. Continued character education: recommending additional reading and video assignments; they have also begun a speaker series to bring school alum in to talk about different aspects of character and leadership.
2. Service to the local school and community: hosting Veterans Appreciation Week in the fall and service projects throughout the year, also with Travis Manion Foundation. TMF Hawks invite the whole school to participate in these projects and typically see about 150 participants at each project (twice per year).

Additionally, TMF Hawks who have graduated from the Character Does Matter program, serve as peer mentors to the youth currently enrolled in the program and often support the sessions at their school. The club has specific leadership roles, Senior and Junior Captains, that individual students take on to lead particular sessions with the current cohort.

COMMENTS FROM FORMER STUDENTS

One student from the 2015 cohort is now at a nearby college pursuing a degree in civil engineering. He recently returned to his high school alma mater to speak to the current students about his time in the CDM program, and had this to say:

"The Travis Manion Foundation has had a profound and lasting impact on my leadership abilities and my character. Through the Character Does Matter program at the Prep I was able to reflect and improve upon my own traits that form a young leader....Overall, I believe that the greatest lesson I learned from the program was that your character directly influences your ability as a leader to give purpose to and improve an organization. As I grow here at Villanova [University], the message of "If Not Me, Then Who" is at the very foundation of my development. I am challenged physically and mentally to take charge and lead amongst my peers. Academically, the ethical lessons I learned from TMF are put into play as I venture into the professional world as a young engineer with the ability to directly impact the lives of my community. The lessons I learned from the TMF program and the mentors who guided us give me more confidence, more drive and more knowledge to lead and be a person of quality character."

--College Sophomore, former St. Joe's Prep CDM participant





COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

In an interview with the teacher who oversees the CDM program as well as the TMF Hawks club, she emphasized that the alumni club started quite insular at first, but later became a catalyst for a cultural shift within the school due to the students' leadership.

"Even teachers who are not involved in the program, are starting to attend student meetings and events to learn more. This program breaks down stereotypes and barriers within the school and fosters dialogue about leadership. As a result the whole school understands veterans, and one another, a little better."

- English Teacher, SJP

Just as importantly, the program is encouraging students to develop their character and leadership outside of the program itself and reach the broader school community and avoid the initial insularity they experienced. The students felt strongly that their mission and message would resonate with others outside the group, and they've since expanded their club's activities to include several other student groups, including: sports teams (crew and football), student interest groups (newspaper, student Republicans, student Democrats), as well as school leadership (the staff Development and Fundraising team).

For instance, they worked with school leadership and the alumni office, to institute a Veterans Appreciation Week, where they invite veterans who are also alumni to come back and speak at the school and attend the week's football game. They also host a fundraiser and supply drive that week to support Veteran organizations, and participate in a school-wide day of service near Veterans Day.

As another example, the students decided they wanted a war memorial on their campus to honor the veterans who had graduated from their school. They wrote a letter to the president of the school, formally making their request and began to make a plan for its design, building, and maintenance. They are currently researching the biographies of the 61 alum who have served in a war, and are connected with a local organization in Philadelphia that works to include veterans' memorials.

"This is the greatest gift the mentors have inspired in our students: the desire to keep talking, continue sharing, persist in working together to strengthen their leadership practice. What's more, we now have an alumni base of "TMF Hawks" now in college, recruiting the TMF lessons in moral courage and ethical decision-making on campuses around the country. These TMF Hawks and Prep alum are leading with intention—and emailing me to return to the Prep on a Thursday morning for a TMF Hawks meeting to share how their TMF formation has informed their leadership experiences collegiately."

- English Teacher, SJP

