



2025 TMF YOUTH IMPACT REPORT

COMPILED USING YOUTH SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS
FROM CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM) MENTORS
THROUGHOUT THE 2023-2024 AND 2024-2025
SCHOOL YEARS

CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM)

FOR OVER A DECADE, TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION'S HALLMARK PROGRAM — CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM) POWERED BY UNDER ARMOUR FREEDOM — HAS TRAINED 3,000+ VETERAN MENTORS TO DELIVER CHARACTER EDUCATION TO YOUNG ADULTS NATIONWIDE. WITH 1 IN 3 YOUTH REPORTING THEY DO NOT HAVE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL IN THEIR LIVES, THE INTERACTION WITH MENTORS HAS FILLED A VOID FOR OVER 800,000 YOUNG LIVES TO DATE.

POWERED BY



KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS:

KEY FINDING 1

VETERAN MENTORS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENT BEHAVIORS, ATTITUDES, AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING

KEY FINDING 2

AFTER TAKING PART IN CDM, YOUTH SERVE AS POSITIVE INFLUENCES AMONG THEIR PEERS AND ACT AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

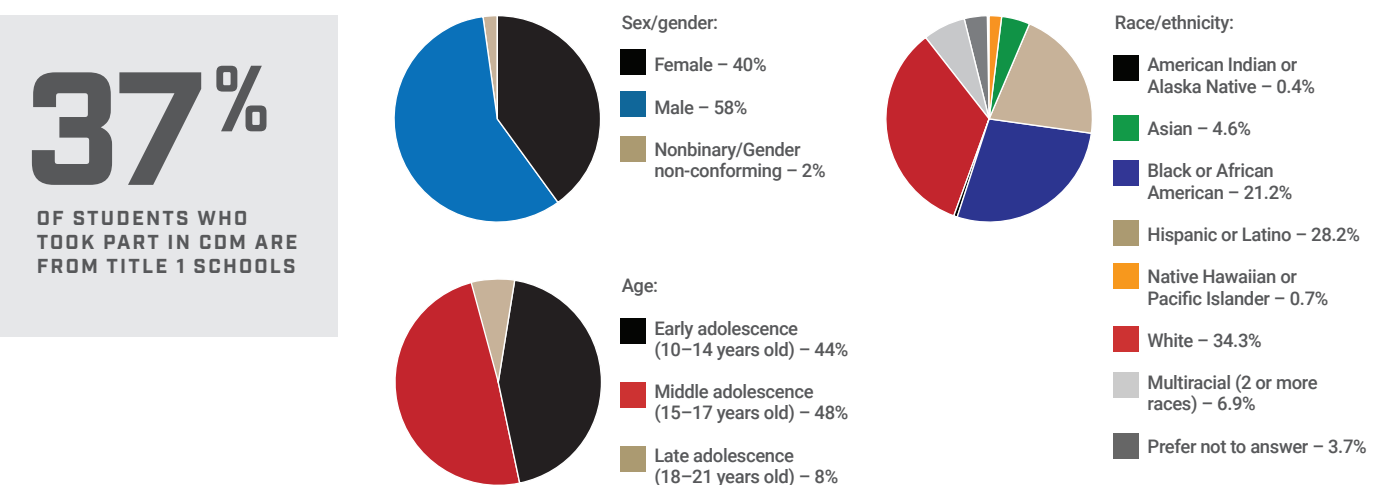
METHODOLOGY:

From 2018 to 2021, TMF partnered with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University to assess the impact of the CDM youth mentoring program. Beginning in 2023, TMF continued this research through an internal evaluation team. This report presents findings from 2,113 student surveys collected across 25 schools nationwide during the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 school years. Through anonymous post-engagement surveys, students were asked to identify and describe any personal benefits they experienced as a result of their interactions with TMF Mentors. These findings are further informed by interviews with school officials, testimonials from TMF Mentors, and perspectives from local civic leaders familiar with the program. Together, these quantitative and qualitative data provide a comprehensive evaluation of CDM's effectiveness and offer insight into its short- and long-term impact on participating students.

The impact of CDM was evaluated by:

- Pre- and post-surveys measuring the students' well-being using the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) scale;
- Examining the change in behavior and attitudes in schools and communities, including attitudes toward risky behaviors and future success;
- Direct feedback from youth in post-surveys;
- Interviews with teachers, administrators, mentors and local civic leaders

DEMOGRAPHICS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS:



MEASURED AREAS OF GROWTH:

Youth respondents demonstrated meaningful growth across multiple areas of personal development and well-being. Survey findings indicate positive outcomes in social-emotional development, behavioral decision-making, mental health and well-being, and leadership and community engagement. Participants reported stronger interpersonal skills and supportive relationships, healthier choices and future-oriented behaviors, increased optimism and sense of belonging, and greater involvement in service and leadership activities. Together, these findings suggest that CDM contributes to both individual growth and positive engagement within schools and communities.

KEY FINDING 1

VETERAN MENTORS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENT BEHAVIORS, ATTITUDES, AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CONFIDENCE | EMPATHY | RESILIENCE | MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

CONFIDENCE

STUDENTS BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES

One notable outcome reported by students who participated in CDM was increased self-confidence. Teachers interviewed for this report described observable changes in students who had previously been reluctant to participate in classroom discussions or engage with peers, but who became more willing to contribute and interact following their involvement in the program. Similar observations were shared by Veteran Mentors and reflected in student survey responses.

In anonymous post-engagement surveys, students frequently identified confidence and self-belief as personal benefits gained through their interactions with Veteran Mentors and participation in CDM. Sample responses included:

- “CDM has helped my confidence and how I express myself to others.”
- “CDM helped me grow as a leader. (It) also helped my confidence and work ethic.”
- “I believe CDM has been teaching me self-confidence.”
- “It builds character into who I am as I feel more confident to do things I wouldn’t consider before.”
- “(CDM) helps me understand who I am.”

90.3%

OF ALL CDM STUDENTS
AGREED OR STRONGLY
AGREED THAT THEY CAN
SUCCEED IF THEY PUT
THEIR MINDS TO IT

According to Felicia Pace, an adjunct professor and coordinator of the Chicago Police and Firefighter Training Academy, one student who used to “bow out” of any running activities due to a lack of confidence responded positively to a Veteran Mentor who shared his own experiences of being scared in difficult situations.

As a result, the student started running, and her classmates began cheering her on. “They started clapping, telling her ‘you got it,’” said Pace, “and just the look on her face, realizing that everyone was supporting her. She didn’t cry, but she had a little tear in her eye. She was like, ‘I was able to do it. I never would have done that before. I’m glad everybody supported me and pushed me through. It wasn’t as bad as I thought.’”

“[CDM] GAVE THEM ENCOURAGEMENT TO DO SOME THINGS THAT THEY WANTED TO DO IN THEIR LIVES THAT THEY FELT LIKE MAYBE THEY WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO DO OR THEY WEREN’T TALENTED ENOUGH OR WHATEVER THEIR APPREHENSIONS WERE. TALKING WITH [THEIR MENTOR] AND [LEARNING ABOUT THE ‘IF NOT ME, THEN WHO...’ ETHOS] MADE THEM FEEL LIKE THEY COULD DO THOSE THINGS.”

— Felicia Pace, Adjunct Professor and Program Coordinator, Chicago Police and Firefighter Training Academy, Chicago, IL

EMPATHY

STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE CARING FOR OTHERS

Empathy emerged as another area of growth among CDM youth. School staff and Veteran Mentors frequently described students demonstrating greater patience, thoughtfulness, and consideration for others—behaviors commonly associated with empathy. Students consistently reported high levels of agreement with statements reflecting empathy and concern for others, with many measures showing continued improvement over time. These findings suggest that empathy is being expressed through students’ everyday behaviors and decision-making, rather than existing solely as an attitude or belief.

In anonymous post-engagement surveys, students identified empathy and understanding others as important benefits gained through their participation in CDM. Sample responses included:

- “CDM has given me new friendships and helped me learn more about empathy.”
- “I have grown to make better decisions for the good of others and will continue to do so in the future.”
- “I believe it has helped develop my ability to understand others.”

89% OF ALL CDM STUDENTS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED IT IS EASY FOR THEM TO CONSIDER THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS



RESILIENCE

STUDENTS BELIEVE THEY CAN OVERCOME CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

Survey findings show that CDM participants demonstrated strong levels of resilience, characterized by perseverance, self-belief, and confidence in their ability to overcome challenges. Across both school years, students consistently reported high levels of agreement with statements reflecting personal agency and future success.

Notably, more than three-quarters reported that they are achieving most of their goals. Students also reported increasing optimism about their futures over the course of the program. Together, these findings indicate that participants possess a strong belief in their ability to navigate challenges, pursue goals, and achieve success.

76.1% AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY ARE ACHIEVING MOST OF THEIR GOALS

“THE WORK THAT OUR VETERANS ARE DOING THROUGH CHARACTER DOES MATTER IS TRULY INVALUABLE. THE LESSONS ON RESILIENCE, LEADERSHIP, TEAMWORK, AND FAIRNESS THEY SHARE NOT ONLY PREPARE OUR STUDENTS TO GROW INTO ADULTS THAT PRIORITIZE FAIRNESS, EQUALITY, AND SERVICE; THEY INSPIRE THEM TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGES IN THEIR LIVES NOW. THROUGH TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION, STUDENTS — INCLUDING THOSE IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES — ARE ADOPTING LIVES OF SERVICE THAT INSPIRE EVERYONE AROUND THEM TO DO THE SAME. THANKS TO TMF, OUR VETERANS ARE FINDING RENEWED PURPOSE BY BUILDING UP THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS THAT WILL LEAD OUR COUNTRY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.”

—Patrick Murphy, former Congressman and 32nd Under Secretary of the Army





MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

STUDENTS FEEL SUPPORTED BY TRUSTED ADULTS

A defining feature of the CDM program is the opportunity for students to build relationships with Veteran Mentors who model character, leadership, and service. School officials consistently described the positive influence mentors have on participating youth. Educators observed that students were highly engaged during mentor interactions and responded positively to the opportunity to learn from adults whose experiences and personal stories brought character lessons to life.

School officials also emphasized the importance of students feeling heard, valued, and respected by their mentors. These relationships helped create an environment in which students felt comfortable sharing their perspectives, building confidence, and developing a stronger sense of self-worth.

83% OF ALL CDM STUDENTS
AGREED OR STRONGLY
AGREED THERE ARE
PEOPLE WHO APPRECIATE
THEM AS A PERSON

“My students knew that their opinions were valued (by their mentors). Sometimes that’s all it takes to make someone feel more confident to stand up for their beliefs,” said an adjunct professor at Glen Rock Middle School in Glen Rock, NJ.

Survey findings further underscore the importance of positive adult role models in students’ lives. Following participation in the program, 80% of students reported having an adult outside of their parent or guardian whom they look up to or find inspiring.



BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

BULLYING AND SUBSTANCE AVOIDANCE | LIFE/CAREER READINESS

BULLYING AND SUBSTANCE AVOIDANCE

STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE STRONG COMMITMENT TO HEALTHY CHOICES AND POSITIVE PEER BEHAVIOR.

Survey findings suggest that CDM reinforces positive decision-making and encourages students to consider how their actions affect themselves and others. Across participating schools, students consistently reported high levels of agreement with statements related to behaviors as it relates to bullying. They also demonstrated avoidance of harmful behaviors like drug and alcohol abuse.

Post-program findings indicate that those positive behaviors and attitudes remained consistently strong throughout their involvement in CDM. These findings suggest that the program helps reinforce protective factors associated with healthy peer relationships, responsible decision-making, and long-term well-being.

In anonymous post-engagement surveys and interviews, students and educators frequently described how CDM discussions around character, teamwork, accountability, and respect influenced the ways students interacted with peers and approached difficult decisions.

LIFE/CAREER READINESS

STUDENTS GAIN GREATER CLARITY ABOUT THEIR FUTURE AND THE ROLE THEY CAN PLAY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

Beyond developing confidence in their ability to succeed, CDM helps students connect their character strengths to future goals, educational opportunities, and career aspirations. Through discussions with Veteran Mentors, students are encouraged to think critically about the decisions they make today and how those decisions influence their future paths. Educators and community partners observed students demonstrating greater self-awareness, responsibility, and understanding of the qualities needed to succeed in both their personal and professional lives.

One example of this impact can be seen through the Chicago Police and Firefighter Training Academy (CPFTA), an after-school program serving high school students interested in careers as first responders. Many students involved in CPFTA come from under-resourced communities in Chicago, where relationships between residents and first responders can, at times, be strained. Through CDM, students explored how character strengths such as bravery, leadership, and honesty can positively influence their future careers and communities.

86.9%

OF STUDENTS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THEY WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO DO SOMETHING WHEN THEY SEE SOMEONE BEING BULLIED, THREATENED, OR HARASSED

97.8%

OF STUDENTS SAID THAT TAKING DRUGS THAT WERE GIVEN TO THEM BY SOMEONE WHO ISN'T A DOCTOR OR PARENT IS NOT OK

97.5%

OF STUDENTS SAID THAT BULLYING SOMEONE BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T LIKE WHAT THEY SAID OR DID WAS NOT OK

Program leaders observed students developing a stronger sense of purpose and a clearer understanding of how they can use their talents, experiences, and character strengths to serve others. Veteran Mentors helped students envision future possibilities while providing practical guidance on leadership, decision-making, and personal responsibility.

As Program Director Martin Foley observed:

“Some of the homes that (these students) come from are not the greatest, so when they’re hearing positive messages from these (CDM Mentors), I think they’re really able to apply it to problems they’re having in their own lives, trying to stay optimistic and always moving forward. ...Some of the students are always coming up after the session is over to ask more questions and try to get a little bit more feedback, try to get a little bit more information about direction in their own lives, where they could take their own careers after they graduate.”

MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

STUDENTS DEVELOP A STRONGER SENSE OF BELONGING, PURPOSE, AND OPTIMISM ABOUT THEIR FUTURE.

Another observable outcome experienced by students who participated in CDM was an increased sense of connection to their peers, schools, and communities. Teachers and school officials interviewed for this report described students forming stronger relationships with one another and building meaningful connections with their Veteran Mentors. Educators also observed students demonstrating greater optimism, teamwork, and engagement within their school communities.

According to Russell Wylie, Principal of Henderson Middle School in Henderson, Texas:

“After we connected [students] through this program, we started noticing them building much stronger bonds with each other in the halls, in classes, at lunch and breakfast. These kids who historically have not had anybody else to connect with at school have really connected with each other. It’s given them that sense of belonging.”

Survey findings also reflected meaningful improvements in indicators related to thriving and well-being. Following participation in CDM, students reported stronger senses of purpose, belonging, and optimism about their futures.

In anonymous post-engagement surveys, students frequently described how the program helped them feel more connected to others and inspired them to contribute positively to their communities. Sample responses included:

- “CDM gives the kids a sense of belonging.”
- “CDM is helping me get involved with the community.”
- “I think about how a goal can be achieved as a team and just not by myself.”
- “I can teach my community to help others.”

79.7%

AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR FUTURE



KEY FINDING 2

AFTER TAKING PART IN CDM, YOUTH SERVE AS POSITIVE INFLUENCES AMONG THEIR PEERS, AND ACT AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

One example of this impact took place at Glen Rock Middle School in New Jersey, where Veteran Mentors delivered curriculum to seventh-grade students that centered on fairness, judgment, teamwork, and social intelligence. At the end of their yearlong engagement, CDM Mentors brought students together for a community service initiative supporting Eva’s Village in Paterson, New Jersey. Working collaboratively, students prepared 100 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and created handwritten cards of encouragement for individuals experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental illness, and addiction.

School staff observed students internalizing the values emphasized throughout the program and applying them in meaningful ways.

As one guidance counselor shared:

“[CDM] gave students another perspective. (We) tried to instill in them that they should take away these different lessons and interpret it however they feel is appropriate in their own lives and backgrounds and use that moving forward to find their own leadership skills and strengths. I could see that they were internalizing the different approach and different values that CDM brought to the table to strengthen their understanding and concept of different skills.”

Long-term engagement with CDM has also contributed to sustained cultures of service within participating schools. At St. Joseph’s Preparatory High School in Philadelphia, students have participated in CDM programming for more than a decade through the school’s Leadership Academy and TMF Youth Club. Students regularly engage in community service activities, including partnering with local food assistance programs and supporting residents at veterans homes.

According to school leaders, these experiences have contributed to a stronger culture of leadership and service throughout the school community.

95%
OF STUDENTS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY OFFER ASSISTANCE WHERE THERE IS A NEED

90%
AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY CAN BE COUNTED ON TO HELP IF SOMEONE NEEDS THEM

89%
AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY CARE ABOUT HOW THEIR DECISIONS AFFECT OTHER PEOPLE

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SERVING OTHERS | LEADERSHIP AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

SERVING OTHERS

STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE INCREASED COMMITMENT TO SERVICE, TEAMWORK, AND HELPING OTHERS.

Across participating schools, Veteran Mentors and educators observed students developing a stronger sense of responsibility toward their peers and communities. Through service-oriented activities and discussion-based character curriculum, students were encouraged to recognize how their individual actions can positively influence others. Survey findings reflected high levels of agreement with statements related to helping behaviors, teamwork, and consideration for others, suggesting that students were not only learning the importance of service but actively applying those lessons within their schools and communities.

“NOW THAT WE’VE BEEN DOING [CDM] FOR 10 YEARS, THE SCHOOL CULTURE HAS BEEN IMPACTED. WE’VE DEVELOPED A REALLY INCREDIBLE, RESPECTED REPUTATION IN BEING SO CONSISTENTLY COMMITTED TO BUILDING A STUDENT’S SENSE OF HIS OWN CHARACTER OR LEADERSHIP AND RECOGNIZING VETERANS AS THESE CONSUMMATE EMBODIMENTS OF LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTER.”

— Susie Cook, English Teacher, St. Joseph’s Preparatory High School





LEADERSHIP AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

STUDENTS DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND BECOME POSITIVE INFLUENCES WITHIN THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.

Across participating schools and youth programs, educators, Veteran Mentors, and community leaders consistently described students demonstrating increased confidence in their ability to lead others and make a positive impact. Through discussion-based curriculum, mentorship, and service opportunities, students were encouraged to recognize leadership not as a title or position but as a daily responsibility reflected through character, decision-making, and relationships with others.

School officials observed students becoming more engaged within their school communities, building stronger peer relationships, and applying lessons learned through CDM in practical ways. Veteran Mentors also emphasized that students developed a deeper understanding of their own character strengths and how those strengths could be used to positively influence others.

One example of this impact can be seen through the Under Armour Student Athlete Leadership Council (SALC) in Baltimore, Maryland. For the fifth consecutive year, Veteran Mentors partnered with Under Armour to support the development of student-athletes identified by their schools as emerging leaders. In 2024, more than 70 students representing public high schools across Baltimore participated in monthly CDM engagements focused on leadership, goal-setting, decision-making, and mental health.

45%

OF ALL TMF VOLUNTEERS
ANNUALLY ARE YOUTH



“I’VE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE IMPACT TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION’S VETERAN MENTORS ARE HAVING ON THE NEXT GENERATION ACROSS OUR COMMUNITY. THROUGH THE CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEARNING TIMELESS LESSONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP, UNITY, INTEGRITY, AND SERVICE DIRECTLY FROM THOSE WHO HAVE WORN OUR NATION’S UNIFORM. WHAT MAKES THIS PROGRAM SO POWERFUL IS THAT THOSE LESSONS DON’T STAY IN THE CLASSROOM—THEY TURN INTO ACTION. STUDENTS STEP FORWARD TOGETHER TO SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES, LEAD IN THEIR SCHOOLS, AND SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THEIR PEERS. THAT’S HOW YOU SHAPE THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS AND WHY PROGRAMS LIKE THIS MATTER SO MUCH.”

— Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, 1st Congressional District, PA

8,663

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS PARTICIPATE
IN SERVICE PROJECTS ANNUALLY
THROUGH TMF

Throughout the year, Veteran Mentors guided students through discussions designed to help them better understand the personal qualities that contribute to effective leadership on and off the field. According to SALC Program Director and Veteran Mentor Blake Maciel, the program helped students identify and strengthen the traits that allow them to positively influence their schools and athletic communities.

Survey findings following participation in CDM curriculum reflected strong leadership-oriented attitudes and behaviors among participating students.



Educators also emphasized that CDM helped students broaden their understanding of what leadership looks like in everyday life.

“The Mentors do an incredible job of guiding the students toward questioning their own assumptions about leadership. Students recognize that they don’t have to be a captain or student council president to be a leader. They can lead on a daily level with the person next to them, anyone who’s watching them, with their family, at school.”

— English Teacher, St. Joseph’s Preparatory
High School, Philadelphia, PA

Similarly, school leaders observed students becoming more connected, engaged, and enthusiastic about contributing positively within their communities.

“CDM is a way to help kids who are less involved in extracurriculars find purpose and connection in the school community. [The students who participated always had] a sense of excitement. They would come to school the day after or leading up [to the program], and they would always be talking about something that they had learned, stuff they had been doing. Toward the end of the year, when they did their service project, they were all about that.”

— Principal, Henderson Middle School,
Henderson, TX



ABOUT CHARACTER DOES MATTER

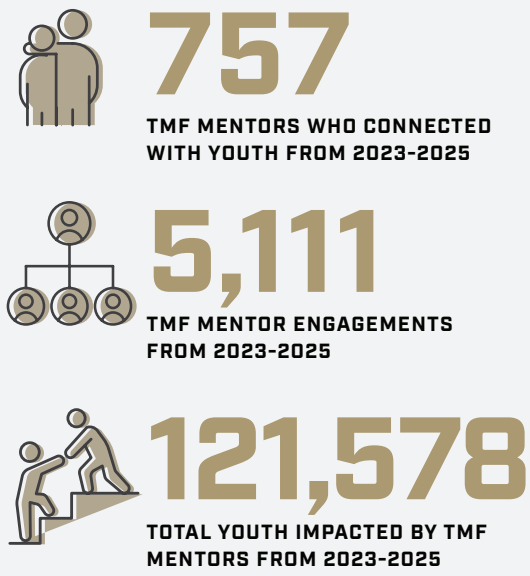
The hallmark program of TMF, Character Does Matter (CDM) Powered by Under Armour Freedom, is a youth mentorship program led by veterans and families of the fallen volunteers that helps develop character and leadership skills in young adults. Grounded in the evidence-based field of Positive Psychology, CDM inspires youth to lead with character in the classroom, on the field, among friends and family, and in their communities.

To date, CDM has empowered 3,000+ veterans and families of the fallen to serve as Mentors nationwide, giving them renewed purpose and connection while inspiring youth to recognize and apply their character strengths in service to others. Mentors have taught and demonstrated the value of character to over 800,000 youth. In addition to lessons in the classroom and at community organizations, Mentors also serve alongside youth in communities through neighborhood cleanups, food drives, and caring for our nation’s most vulnerable populations.

CDM CAN BE DELIVERED IN VARIOUS WAYS:

- **Presentations:** Interactive discussions led by a Veteran Mentor that teach youth about character strengths through demonstrative stories and how to apply the “If Not Me, Then Who...” ethos by serving others.
- **Courses:** A deeper dive into character strengths through a minimum of 8 hours of hands-on experiential learning led by a Veteran Mentor to a small group of youth. Curriculum includes lesson plans that focus on discussions about character strengths, the personal sharing of stories to model those strengths, and group activities that require the application of those strengths. Courses, which can be structured as a half-day, full-day, or multi-week workshop, culminate in a youth-led service project.
- **Community Impact:** Service-learning opportunity where a Veteran Mentor works closely with youth to identify a specific need in their community, then design and execute a service project.

37% OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN CDM ARE FROM TITLE 1 SCHOOLS



LOOKING AHEAD

In the years to come, CDM will evolve to have a greater emphasis on youth serving as leaders within their team, school, or community. There will also be a focus on expanding TMF Youth Clubs—there are currently 40 across the country—and growth of Teams of Character, an initiative that brings CDM to youth sports teams. Both will further strengthen the connection between youth and TMF, allowing them to remain involved in the mission as they move forward in their lives.

As of the 2025-2026 school year:

- 40 TMF Youth Clubs nationwide ranging from 25-100+ student members
- 28 active Teams of Character
- 1,250 young athletes participating in Teams of Character

“FOCUSING ON CHARACTER STRENGTHS GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO THE ATHLETES ABOUT WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEAMMATE, STUDENT, ATHLETE AND WHAT WILL HELP SHAPE THEM INTO AN ADULT THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR COMMUNITY. ONCE WE TALK ABOUT THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND POINT OUT THOSE THAT INSTILL THEM, OTHERS STRIVE FOR THAT RECOGNITION. WHEN THEY RECEIVE IT, THEY THEN STRIVE TO ACHIEVE THE NEXT STRENGTH AND SO ON. THIS DRIVE TO DO BETTER AND THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT RECEIVED WHEN ACHIEVED IS A SHOT OF CONFIDENCE EACH TIME.”

— Athletic Director, Mendon Community Unit School District, Illinois
TMF Team of Character



LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TMF
MENTORS ARE IMPACTING YOUTH
THROUGH CDM HERE:

