

# Assessing Positive Mental and Physical Health Outcomes for Veterans



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Summary of Findings in Collaboration with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families



# Assessing Positive Mental and Physical Health Outcomes for Veterans

**T**he 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. Their 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. They 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.

**"TMF improves my sense of well-being. TMF empowers me to take initiative to be innovative and collaborate with my community to make it a better place for me, my family, and future generations."**

*—Military Veteran*





## PRIMARY FINDING: Participants of Multiple TMF Initiative Types have Increased Positive Mental and Physical Health Outcomes

### Programs Grounded in Evidence-Based Research

TMF's programs are grounded in the field of Positive Psychology, which studies the attributes and characteristics that lead individuals and communities to improve their well-being and thrive. Three areas that enable individuals and communities to thrive are meaning, relationships, and engagement. Thriving and well-being improves when people are able to identify what gives their lives meaning and purpose; develop and deepen relationships; and fully engage in activities in an effort to capture and communicate impact.

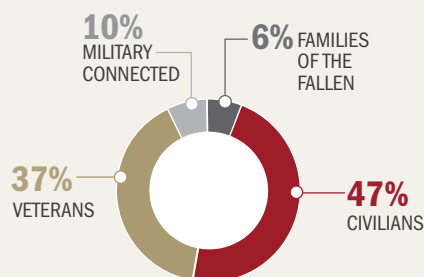
This report evaluates the effectiveness of TMF initiatives on improving the level of thriving and well-being among participating veterans, families of the fallen, and civilian members. We use the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT)<sup>1</sup> scale to determine the effect that program participation may have on individual thriving and well-being. **Our evaluation shows that those who participate in more types of TMF initiatives have better outcomes.**

#### TOTAL RESPONDENTS

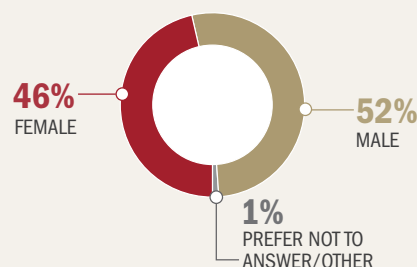
OCTOBER 2019  
**4,918**

Survey design, methods, and detailed results are explained in the companion technical report.

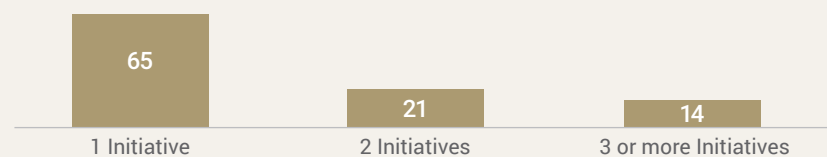
#### MILITARY CONNECTION



#### GENDER



### Participants of Multiple TMF Initiative Types



Percentage of survey respondents who ever participated in 1, 2, or 3 or more different types of TMF initiatives.

**NOTE:** The number of initiatives does not reflect the number of activities in which an individual participated. For example, if an individual participated in multiple Operation Legacy service projects that would only reflect one initiative (Operation Legacy service projects).



## TMF INITIATIVES

### Character & Leadership Training

Character Does Matter (CDM) aims to empower 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 then deliver proprietary character development curriculum focused on helping youth adopt the "If Not Me, Then Who..." mantra.

### Personal Development Seminars

Through Leading With Your Strengths, a series of best-in-class personal development and leadership training workshops, veterans learn to identify their strengths, uncover their purpose, and tell their stories. Rooted in the evidence-based field of Positive Psychology, curriculum seeks to help attendees thrive individually and create impact at home, at work, and in the community.

### Expeditions

Service-based trips that provide opportunities for veterans and families of the fallen to connect, build relationships, and work together domestically and abroad. Alongside others who have experienced loss or are seeking leadership development, participants continue their journeys of healing while receiving training and empowerment resources, and continuing the legacies of fallen heroes through meaningful projects.

### 9/11 Heroes Run 5Ks

Annual collective of more than 90 volunteer-led 5Ks that take place domestically and abroad to honor the legacy of heroes of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and the wars since. Runners, walkers, and ruckers of all levels and ages unite on or around 9/11 to pay tribute and answer the call of "If Not Me, Then Who..." and honor America's heroes.

### Community Service Projects

Through a national movement called Operation Legacy, TMF leverages the servant leadership of veterans, families of the fallen and TMF members to address critical needs in communities worldwide. Volunteers lead service projects that include park clean-ups, tree plantings in honor of fallen heroes, home rehabilitations, and more.

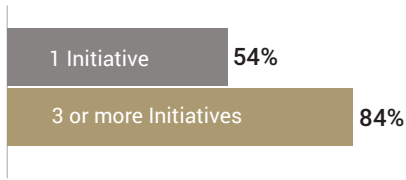
# Increase in Veteran Health and Well-Being

## CONNECTEDNESS

Veterans and families of the fallen show an increased connectedness score with increased participation\*

CONNECTEDNESS

Sample Question:  
My involvement with TMF has provided me with a sense of community



Several studies have investigated the association between mental health and community connectedness. Overall, much of the existing research suggests there are relationships between aspects of community connection (e.g. sense of community, social support, etc.) and facets of well-being (e.g. self-esteem, mental illness, physical health, etc.). While the research and evidence related to community variables and mental health is still growing, it is likely that addressing multiple components of community connectedness and social relationships could be an effective approach in increasing positive psychosocial outcome<sup>2,9</sup>.

## HEALTH

Veterans and families of the fallen show a significant increase in emotional/mental health score with increased initiative participation\*

HEALTH

Sample Question:  
In the last 3 months, I am satisfied with my emotional/mental health



**"[TMF impacts me in that] I feel better physically which helps me mentally feel better as well."**

—Active Duty Service Member

## THRIVING

Veterans and families of the fallen show a significant increase in thriving score with increased initiative participation\*

THRIVING

Sample Question:  
My life has a clear sense of purpose



### Brief Inventory of Thriving Questions:

	1 Initiative (%)	3 or more Initiative (%)
My life has a clear sense of purpose	71	83
I am optimistic about my future	88	93
My life is going well	85	92
I feel good most of the time	78	88
What I do in life is valuable and worthwhile	85	93
I can succeed if I put my mind to it	93	97
I am achieving most of my goals	76	85
In most activities I do, I feel energized	81	92
There are people who appreciate me as a person	91	95
I feel a sense of belonging in my community	69	82

## RESILIENCY

Veterans and families of the fallen show a significant increase in their overall resiliency score with increased initiative participation\*

RESILIENCY

Sample Question:  
It's often true that I am a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties



—The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10) was used to assess participant resiliency. CD-RISC-10 scores are out of a total of 40 points, where higher scores represent greater resiliency.<sup>10</sup>



**"TMF has helped me look at hardship or suffering in a different light. None of the problems I have seem so big when I consider the stories of heroes such as Travis and the families that those heroes leave behind. TMF has made me more resilient."**

—Active Duty Service Member

## CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM) MENTORSHIP


- **88%** of CDM Mentors, compared to **60%** of Veteran non-CDM Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement with TMF has provided them with a sense of community.
- **82%** of CDM Mentors were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their emotional/mental health in the last 3 months, compared to **67%** of Veteran non-CDM Mentors.

### Brief Inventory of Thriving Questions:

	Veteran non-CDM Mentors (%)	CDM Mentors (%)
My life has a clear sense of purpose	74	87
My life is going well	86	95
I am achieving most of my goals	78	89
In most activities I do, I feel energized	84	92
I feel a sense of belonging in my community	62	83

\* Significant difference in score with increased initiative participation.

NOTE: All scores represent the sum of the 2 highest positive categories. For example, satisfied and extremely satisfied were combined to include both responses in the scoring.



**“TMF helps build necessary - and often rare - bridges between veteran and civilian communities.”**

—Military Veteran

## Civilian Health and Well-Being

### TMF Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide

As the size of the military shrinks relative to the U.S. population and fewer people have personal connections to those who have served, there is a perception of a growing disconnect between civilians and the military-connected population.

- Although TMF is a Veteran Serving Organization, 60% of their offerings are open to civilians.
- Civilians experienced similar positive outcomes to veterans and families of the fallen with increased participation across initiatives. For example, **91%** of veterans and **84%** of civilians who participated in 3 or more TMF initiatives either agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement in TMF has encouraged them to become more involved in their community.
- **47%** of survey respondents indicated that they were civilian and did not select any other form of military connection (i.e. Military Spouse, Military Caregiver, Military Child).

The diverse demographic makeup of TMF participants, along with their comments, suggest that TMF, as a Veteran Serving Organization, is succeeding in creating a rare and unique connection between civilians and those who are military connected.

### Thriving, Health, and Resiliency

- Those with increased participation across TMF initiatives were healthier, more likely to be thriving, and had greater resiliency.
- **Over 90%** of veterans, families of the fallen, and civilians who were involved in 3 or more initiatives agree or strongly agree that their involvement with TMF has had a positive impact on their life and that they have been inspired to serve others more.

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**“[TMF] has given a great sense of community and has motivated me to be of service.”**

—Military Child

**“Life changing. TMF has given me a sense of purpose and inspired me to serve in all aspects of my life.”**

—Civilian



<sup>1</sup> Su, R., Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2014). The development and validation of Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT). *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. Published online before print. doi: 10.1111/aphw.12027

<sup>2</sup> De Silva, M. J., McKenzie, K., Harpham, T., & Huttly, S. R. A. (2005). Social capital and mental illness: A systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 59, 619-627. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.029678>

<sup>3</sup> Hare-Duke, L., Dening, T., de Oliveira, D., Milner, K., & Slade, M. (2019). Conceptual framework for social connectedness in mental disorders: Systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 245, 188-199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.10.359>

<sup>4</sup> House, J. R., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science*, 241, 540-545.

<sup>5</sup> Kobau, R., Seligman, M. E. P., Peterson, C., Diener, E., Zack, M. M., Chapman, D., & Thompson, W. (2011). Mental health promotion in public health: Perspectives and strategies from positive psychology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), e1-e9.

<sup>6</sup> Palis, H., Marchand, K., & Oviedo-Joekes, E. (2018). The relationship between sense of community belonging and self-rated mental health among Canadians with mental or substance use disorders. *Journal of Mental Health*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2018.1437602>

<sup>7</sup> Stone, D. M., Holland, K. M., Bathrolo, B., Crosby, A. E., Davis, S., & Williams, N. (2017). Preventing suicide: A technical package of policies, programs, and practices. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicideTechnicalPackage.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Terry, R., Townley, G., Brusilovskiy, E., & Salzer, M. S. (2018). The influence of sense of community on the relationship between community participation and mental health for individuals with serious mental illnesses. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 47, 163-175. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22115>

<sup>9</sup> Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592>

<sup>10</sup> Davidson JRT. Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CDRISC) Manual. Unpublished. 08-19-2018, accessible at [www.cdric.com](http://www.cdric.com).

The annual survey was designed to understand the relationship between TMF initiatives and participant outcomes, not to determine causality.

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## Technical Report

### About TMF

Centered around the ethos “If Not Me, Then Who...,” the Travis Manion Foundation (TMF) empowers veterans and families of the fallen to develop character in future generations. On April 29th, 2007, 1stLt. Travis Manion was killed by enemy sniper while saving his wounded teammates. Before leaving for his final deployment to Iraq, Travis, described his sense of duty in one simple, but powerful statement, “If Not Me, Then Who...” These words are at the core of the work of the Foundation. TMF exists to carry on the legacy of character, service, and leadership embodied by Travis and all those who have served and continue to serve our nation. TMF, through its numerous community-driven activities, supports veterans along with families of the fallen to develop a deeper sense of purpose, relationships, and engagement. Additionally, through character-driven programming, veterans and families of fallen heroes work directly with our nation's youth.

It is with these activities, along with the tireless dedication of those involved with the Foundation, that Travis’s legacy continues to grow, inspiring people to live with character and impact by serving others.

### IVMF Background

About the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, the IVMF delivers leading programs in career, vocational, and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports communities through collective impact efforts that enhance delivery and access to services and care. The Institute, supported by a distinguished advisory board, along with public and private partners, is committed to advancing the lives of those who have served in America’s armed forces and their families. For more information, visit [ivmf.syracuse.edu](http://ivmf.syracuse.edu) and follow the IVMF on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### Built on Research: Connectedness and Health:

TMF initiatives and programming are designed to bring people together—to connect and serve community—for a purpose greater than themselves. Therefore, TMF believes that community service and engagement build valuable connections and relationships, not only for those served directly by TMF programs, but also for the community of TMF Mentors and volunteers. Further, by training the youth and focusing on building character and connectedness early in life, these values and tools will be available to those involved with TMF for years to come.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between mental health and aspects of community connection, such as social connectedness or connection, loneliness, sense of community, community support and social support, social capital, sense of belonging, social isolation, community engagement or involvement, etc. A seminal study in 1988 showed that lack of social connection does greater harm to

health than high blood pressure, smoking, or obesity.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, social ties and connections can influence physical health through behavioral, physiological, and psychosocial mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Overall, much of the existing research suggests positive relationships between community connection<sup>3</sup>, social capital and relationships, improved mental health, and positive mental health outcomes.<sup>4</sup> For example, one study found that in a sample of participants with mental illnesses, those with greater levels of community participation reported higher levels of sense of community and lower levels of psychological distress.<sup>5</sup> While the research and evidence behind the relationship between community variables and mental health/well-being is still growing,<sup>6</sup> it is likely that addressing multiple components of community connectedness and social relationships could be an effective approach in improving psychosocial outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

There are many prominent public health initiatives focusing on the importance and role of community connectedness in individual mental health.<sup>8</sup> One primary example is the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its suicide prevention initiative. The CDC cites isolation as a primary risk factor for suicide and community support and connectedness as protective factors for suicide. One of the principal strategies that the CDC proposes for preventing suicide is the promotion of connectedness, specifically through peer norm programs and community engagement activities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> House, J. R., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science*, 241, 540-545.

<sup>2</sup> Umberson, D. & Montez, J. K. (2010). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51, S54-S66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221465038501>

<sup>3</sup> Saeri, A. K., Cruwys, T., Barlow, F. K., Stronge, S., & Sibley, C. G. (2018). Social connectedness improves public mental health: Investigating bidirectional relationships in the New Zealand attitudes and values survey. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 52(4), 365-374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867417723990>

<sup>4</sup> Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592>

<sup>5</sup> Terry, R., Townley, G., Brusilovskiy, E., & Salzer, M. S. (2018). The influence of sense of community on the relationship between community participation and mental health for individuals with serious mental illnesses. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 47, 163-175. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22115>

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<sup>7</sup> Hare-Duke, L., Denning, T., de Oliveira, D., Milner, K., & Slade, M. (2019). Conceptual framework for social connectedness in mental disorders: Systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 245, 188-199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.10.359>

<sup>8</sup> Kobau, R., Seligman, M. E. P., Peterson, C., Diener, E., Zack, M. M., Chapman, D., & Thompson, W. (2011). Mental health promotion in public health: Perspectives and strategies from positive psychology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), e1-e9.

<sup>9</sup> Stone, D. M., Holland, K. M., Bathrolow, B., Crosby, A. E., Davis, S., & Williams, N. (2017). Preventing suicide: A technical package of policies, programs, and practices. National Center for Injury Prevention and



## Annual Survey

The Annual TMF Survey was designed to capture TMF member experience and their thriving, resiliency, and well-being outcomes. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Survey was sent to all TMF members beginning October 29, 2019 and included 2 reminders (November 6 and November 18). All responses were recorded between October 29 and December 18 of 2019.

## Questionnaire and Measurement

The 2019 Annual Survey contained similar content to the 2018 Survey and was composed of three primary sections: a set of demographic questions, questions related to TMF programming and member involvement, and questions related to thriving, resiliency, and well-being. The demographic section included questions related to veteran and military status and basic characteristics such as age and gender. TMF member involvement was assessed in several ways. Respondents were asked to select all of the TMF initiatives they had ever participated in. If any selected Character Does Matter (CDM) initiatives, additional questions were asked about their CDM engagement. Open ended questions were also included in the survey to capture more in-depth feedback. Thriving was evaluated using the 10 Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) questions. The health questions asked respondents to state their satisfaction with their physical health, mental health, sleep quality, eating habits/diet, and physical activity. A set of 10 resiliency questions were added to the survey in 2019. Resiliency was included to help TMF better understand the health and wellbeing of its members.

The outcome questions addressing wellness, thriving, and resiliency all used 5-point Likert scales. Each participant was asked to respond to the 10 question BIT and the 10 question CD-RISC-10 resiliency scales, as well as other questions related to health and well-being. The choices ranged from positive to negative, with varying degrees of sentiment, for example: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. When a percentage is presented it includes respondents who selected either of the highest categories. For example, strongly agree and agree were aggregated and compared across the different initiative involvement categories.

## Results

A total of 4,918 members responded to the survey out of 104,658 members with valid email addresses. The response rate for veterans and families of the fallen is estimated to be at least 10%.<sup>10</sup> The Survey was designed to be administered annually to measure member change from year to year. Of the respondents to the 2019 Survey, 404 of them took the survey the previous year. There was little to no change in health and well-being between 2018 and 2019 for those who took the survey twice.

## TMF Survey Respondents

Those classified as veterans include those who selected 'Active duty / Activated National Guard / Activated Reserve,' 'Veteran,' or 'National Guard / Reserve component/ IRR'. Those with a military

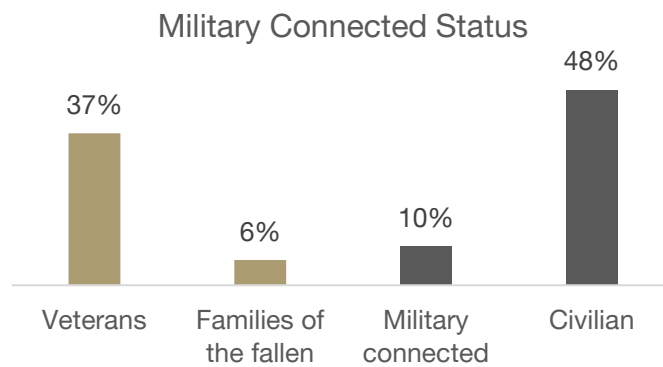
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<sup>10</sup> Veteran status is not known for all members, but a conservative estimate suggests the veterans and families of the fallen response rate at least 10%, if not higher.

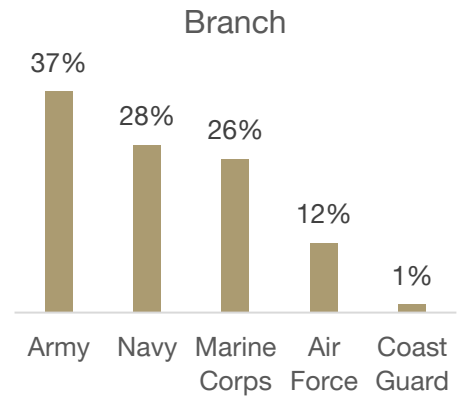
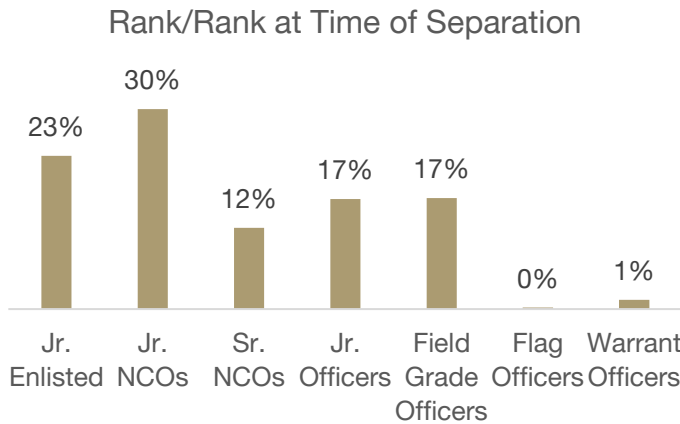
connected status selected ‘Military Spouse,’ ‘Military caregiver,’ or ‘Military child.’ Public servant and educator are occupations that respondents could also select as a status.

If respondents selected more than a status, the status chosen for the purposes of this analysis was prioritized in the following order: active military/veteran, families of the fallen, military connected, and then civilian. If only an occupation was selected (i.e. Public Servant) then the respondent was classified as civilian. Traditionally, TMF considers veterans and families of the fallen as one group and refers to them as such or simply as veterans. Similarly, civilians and military connected individuals are grouped together, and referred to as civilians, unless noted otherwise.

Of those who responded to the survey, civilians comprised the largest group, followed by veterans, military connected, and families of the fallen.



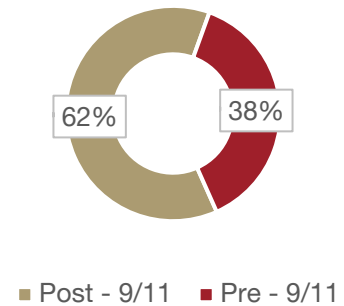
Presented below are the demographics of the veteran or activity duty survey respondents. Sixty-five percent of veteran or activity duty respondents were enlisted and 62% served post-9/11. Less than a quarter of veteran respondents were under the age of 35 with over 50% of respondents between the ages of 35 and 54.



As noted earlier, the responses to this survey were recorded October to December of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the United States in the spring of 2020. Therefore, it is more difficult to assume statuses from this time period persist, as the employment experience reflects the career status at the end of 2019. It is possible that these responses may not reflect the current status of respondents.

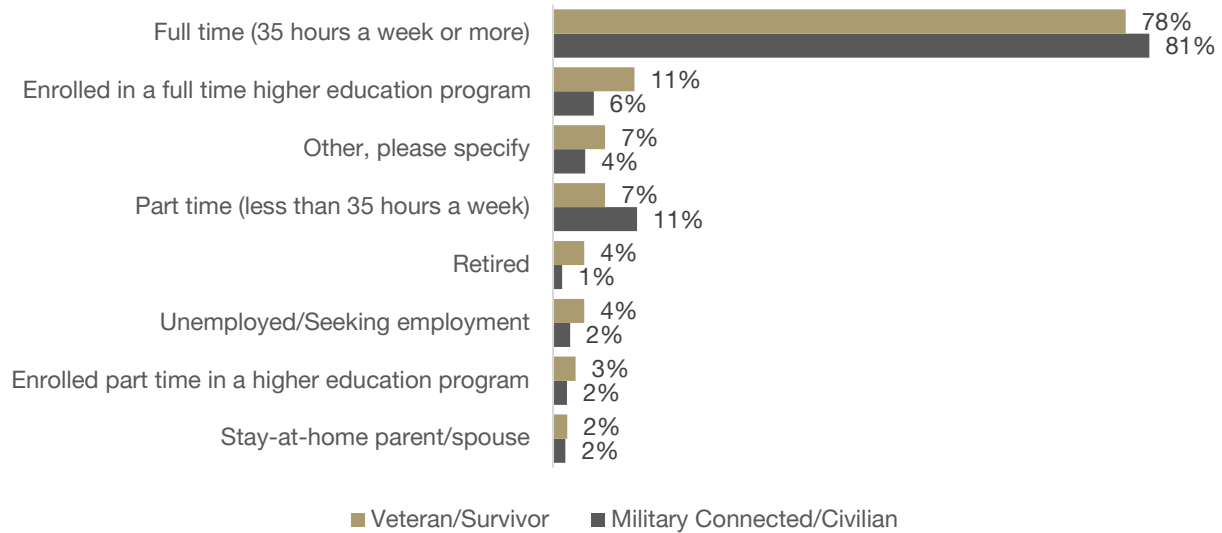
Since the employment question was multi-select, the graph represents the percent of people who responded to each status.<sup>11</sup> For example, 78% of veterans stated that they work ‘Full time (35 hours a week or more).’ Although not displayed graphically here, the employment status of CDM Mentors was higher than for the veterans at large, with 87% stating that they work ‘Full time (35 hours a week or more).’

### Era of Service



<sup>11</sup> Because respondents could select more than one choice, the percentages will be higher than 100%.

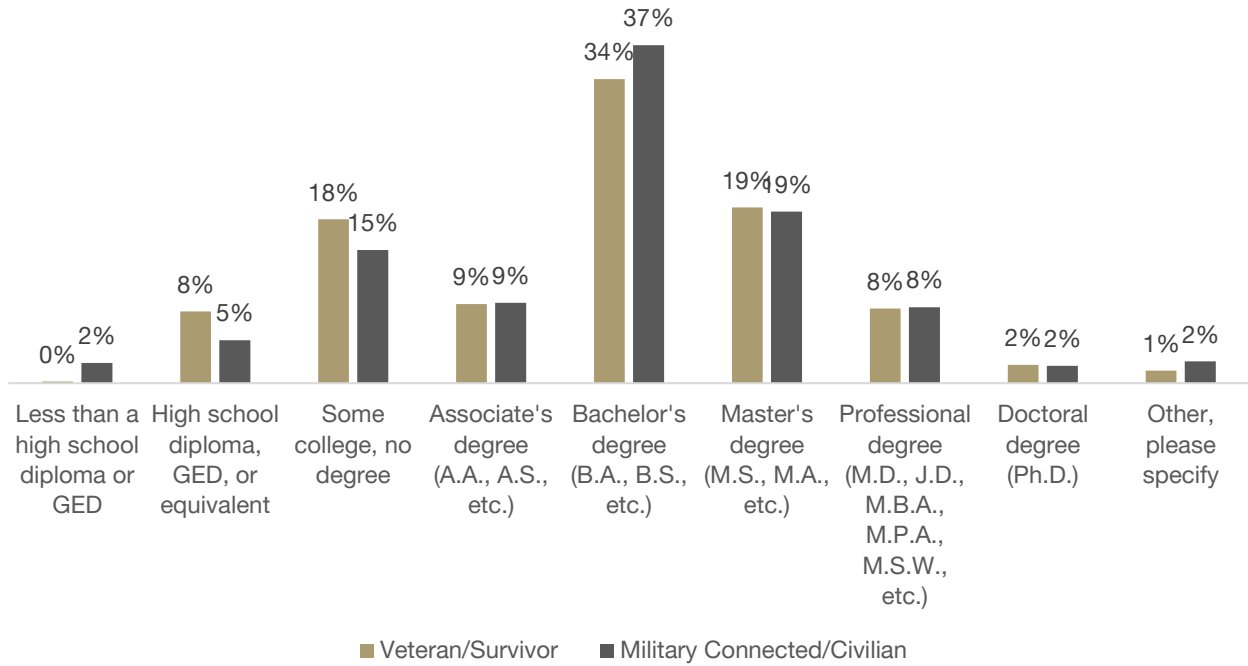
Employment and Education Career Status



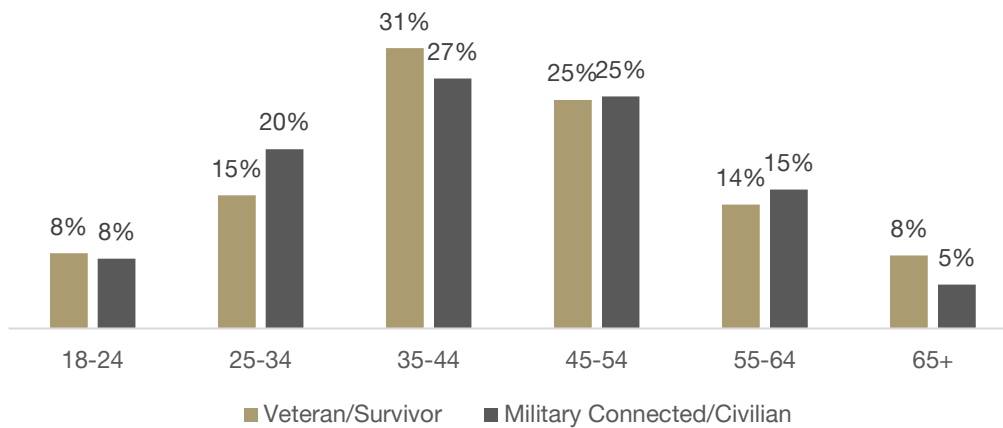
Seventy-seven percent of respondents classified as veterans and families of the fallen had an Associates degree or higher, compared to 73% of civilians. This could partly be due to a larger percentage of civilians (3.7%) being younger than 18, compared to veterans and families of the fallen (1%).



Highest Level of Education Completed



Age



The demographic distribution of respondents is comparable to those who took the survey in 2018. For example, in 2018 62% of all members stated that they were involved with TMF for 2 years or less. In 2019, 63% reported being involved with TMF 2 years or less. Not all respondents reported a military status. Therefore, overall reporting for a question or response may vary when broken down by reported military status.



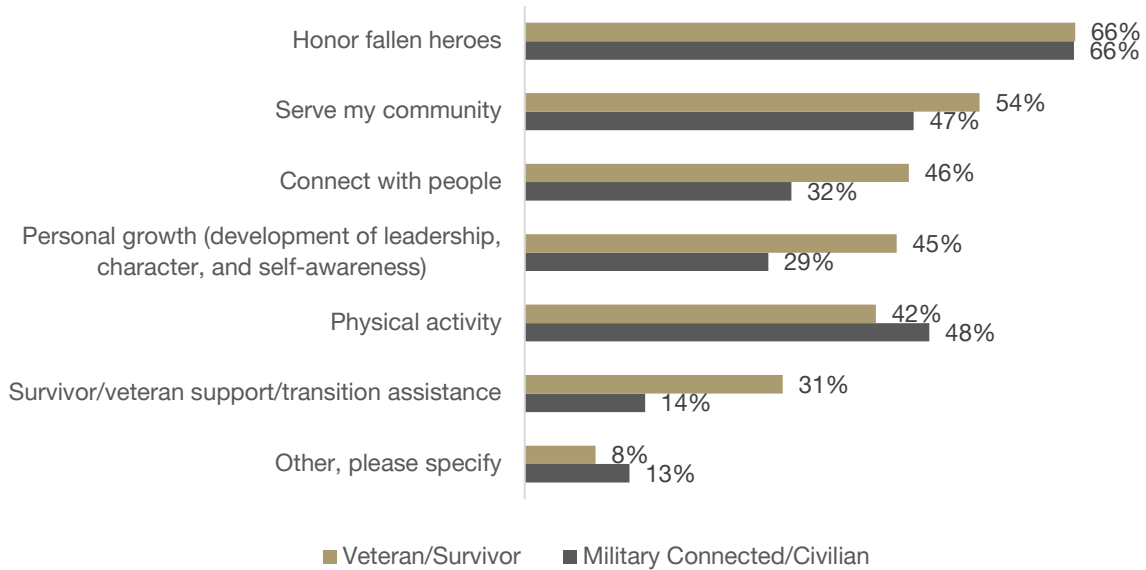
Similarly, the overall demographic makeup of veteran and civilian respondents is nearly the same. The few differences can be seen in age and education level, with veterans reporting older ages and higher likelihood of having obtained a bachelor’s degree or being enrolled in higher education.

### Reasons for Joining

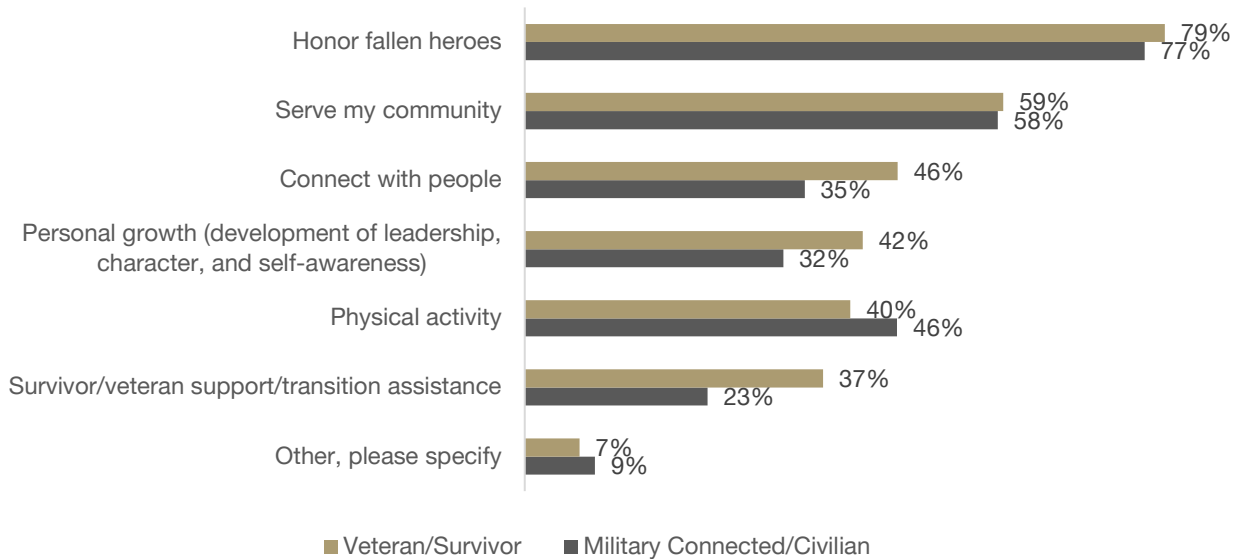
TMF members (with TMF for one year or less) were asked why they got involved with TMF. Similarly, TMF members (those involved for two years or more) were asked why they stay involved with TMF. Both veterans and civilians reported ‘Honor fallen heroes’ as their number one reason for getting involved with TMF and staying involved. Veterans also listed ‘Serve my community,’ ‘Connect with people,’ and ‘Personal growth’ as other top reasons for getting involved as well as staying involved. Civilians reported ‘Physical activity’ as their second highest reason to get involved and like their veteran counterparts, ‘Serve my community’ as their second top reason to stay involved.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Because respondents could select more than one choice, the percentages will be higher than 100%.

Question: Why did you get involved with TMF?



Question: Why do you choose to stay involved with TMF?

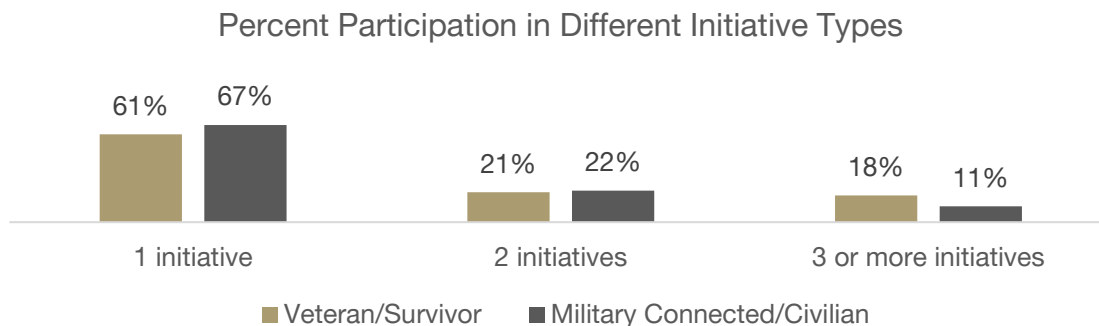


### TMF Initiatives

In the survey we asked respondents to select all initiative types in which they had ever participated, and this was used to categorize level of member involvement. Members who participated in more types of initiatives overall fell into a higher category than those who may have participated in one type of initiative many times. For example, if an individual participated in multiple Operation Legacy service projects, that would only reflect one initiative (Operation Legacy service projects), but if they participated in Operation Legacy and a Hero Run, it would count as two initiatives.<sup>13</sup>

Veterans were more likely to participate in 3 or more initiatives, likely because there are some that are only available to veterans and/or families of the fallen. For example, the CDM programs are led by veterans, and civilians typically are not trained to be Mentors.<sup>14</sup>

Below are the top ten activities respondents selected. Not included in the graph were the question options ‘CDM Character and Leadership Course as a student,’ ‘Character Does Matter (CDM) presentation as a student,’ ‘Leadership Expedition,’ and ‘Other.’<sup>15 16</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Typically, TMF understands engagement to mean that a member was involved in 2 or more initiatives (it could be the same type of initiative done twice) in a 12-month period. This definition was not used because associating administrative engagement data to survey respondents was unreliable. An alternative or proxy measure of engagement was chosen using a question from the survey to evaluate the nature of the relationship between engagement and wellness.

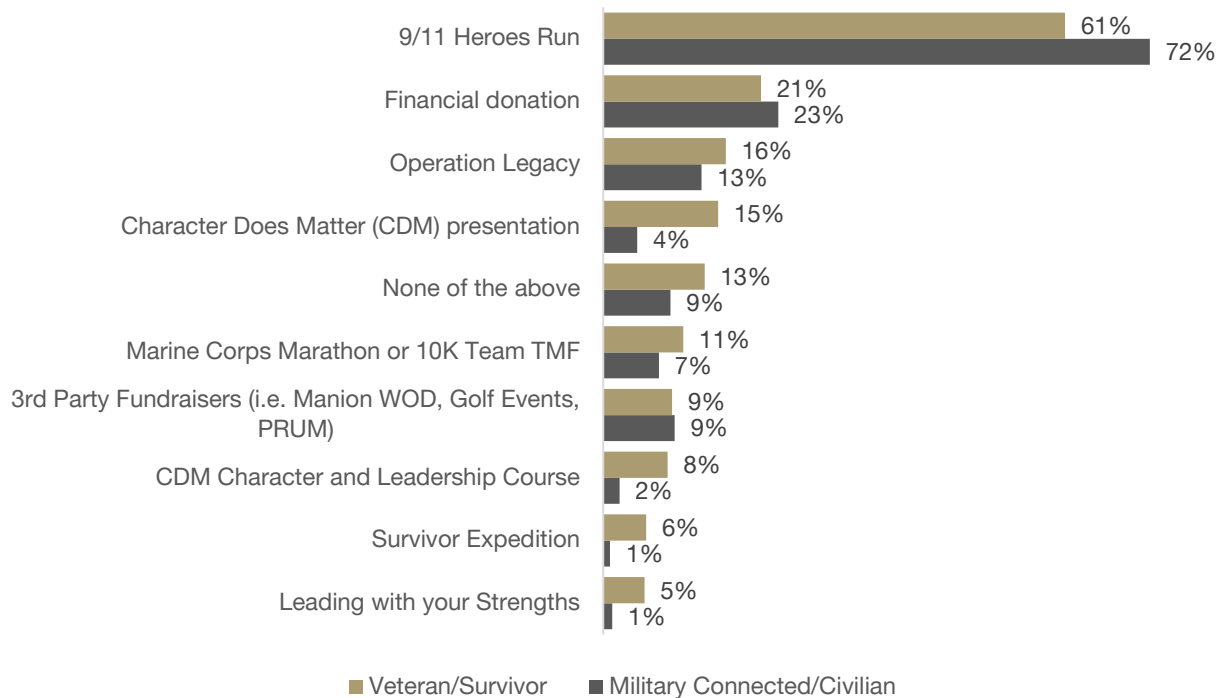
<sup>14</sup> Some CDM Mentors that are not veterans or families of the fallen but they are first responders.

<sup>15</sup> Because respondents could select more than one choice, the percentages will be higher than 100%.

<sup>16</sup> All survey responders were considered to have participated in at least one initiative because the survey was only sent to those that had previously engaged in a TMF activity.



Top 10 Activities Selected



Veteran Health and Well-being

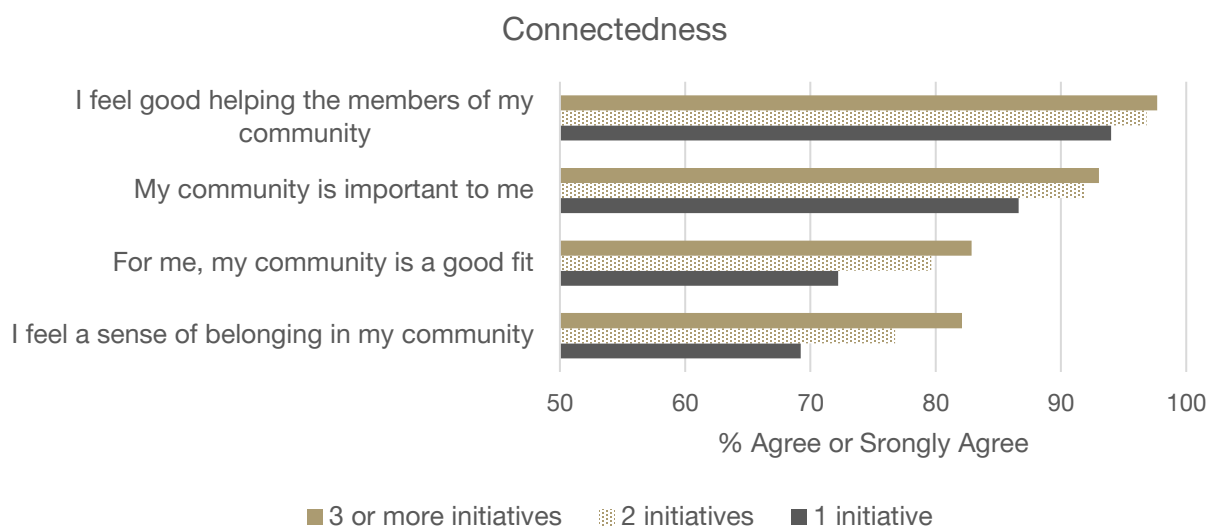
***“TMF improves my sense of well-being. TMF empowers me to take initiative to be innovative and collaborate with my community to make it a better place for me, my family, and future generations.” —Military Veteran***

The focus of this report is on the experience of veterans and families of the fallen. Therefore, the health and well-being results presented will be those of the veterans and families of the fallen, unless otherwise specified. Many of the trends and outcomes are comparable between veterans and families of the fallen, and civilians. Where there is a different experience or outcome for the civilians this will be noted.

TMF focuses on building its members’ strengths, because building strengths also increases protective factors which help people get through adversity. The CDC developed a list of protective factors, based

on research, that decrease suicide risk. Two of these protective factors, promoting connectedness and teaching coping and problem-solving skills,<sup>17</sup> are focus areas in TMF programming.

In particular, promoting connectedness is a key area of focus for TMF, which is evident in both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. In the Survey we asked four questions specifically related to connectedness and in each, those with greater engagement felt more connected to their community.<sup>18</sup>



Also, there were many comments made by members regarding how TMF has helped them feel more connected. Below are a few examples:

*“Attending SLS last year gave me such a feeling of belonging to a community again. I’ve made so many great friends through TMF experiences that I never would have met without the opportunities provided to me by my participation with TMF!”*

*“I honestly had no idea what to expect with my first 9/11 run and I can say it was truly one of the coolest and most humbling things I’ve ever experienced. From the pre-race to the actual race itself there was a feeling of unification among everyone there. Not just the runners but those supporting the runners too. I walked away very thankful to be a part of something as great as this.”*

<sup>17</sup> Stone, D. M., Holland, K. M., Bathrolow, B., Crosby, A. E., Davis, S., & Williams, N. (2017). Preventing suicide: A technical package of policies, programs, and practices. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicideTechnicalPackage.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Where percentages are not displayed on the graph, refer to Appendix A

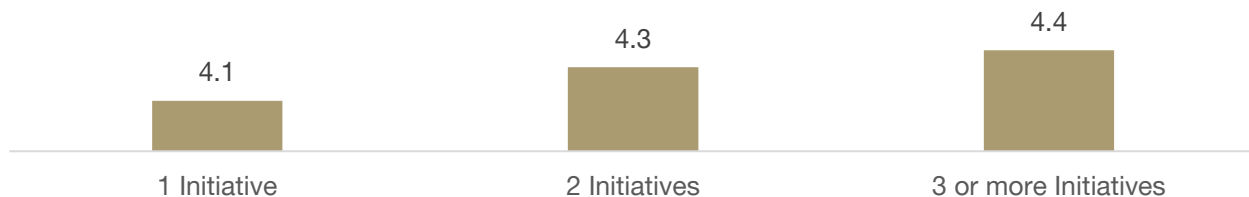
*“It [TMF] has had a very strong impact particularly when it came to transitioning from active duty to civilian life. TMF provided me with a strong sense of community and value.”*

### Thriving

TMF believes its programs are successful because the principles that underpin them are grounded in the field of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology was founded to study the attributes and characteristics that lead individuals and communities to improve their well-being and thrive.<sup>19</sup> Three areas that enable individuals and communities to thrive are meaning, relationships, and engagement. Thriving and well-being improves when people can identify what gives their lives meaning and purpose, develop and deepen relationships, and fully engage in activities. Although measuring the degree of individual thriving and well-being can be challenging, it can be assessed through validated measures and scales. For this evaluation, the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) scale was used to determine the relationship between program participation and individual thriving and well-being.

The mean score for the 10-question BIT scales are presented below. There is a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the thriving score based on the level of participation across different initiatives. Greater engagement, as indicated by more diverse initiative participation, is associated with a higher thriving score. The score is an average across all questions with the highest possible score a 5 and the lowest score a 1.<sup>20</sup>

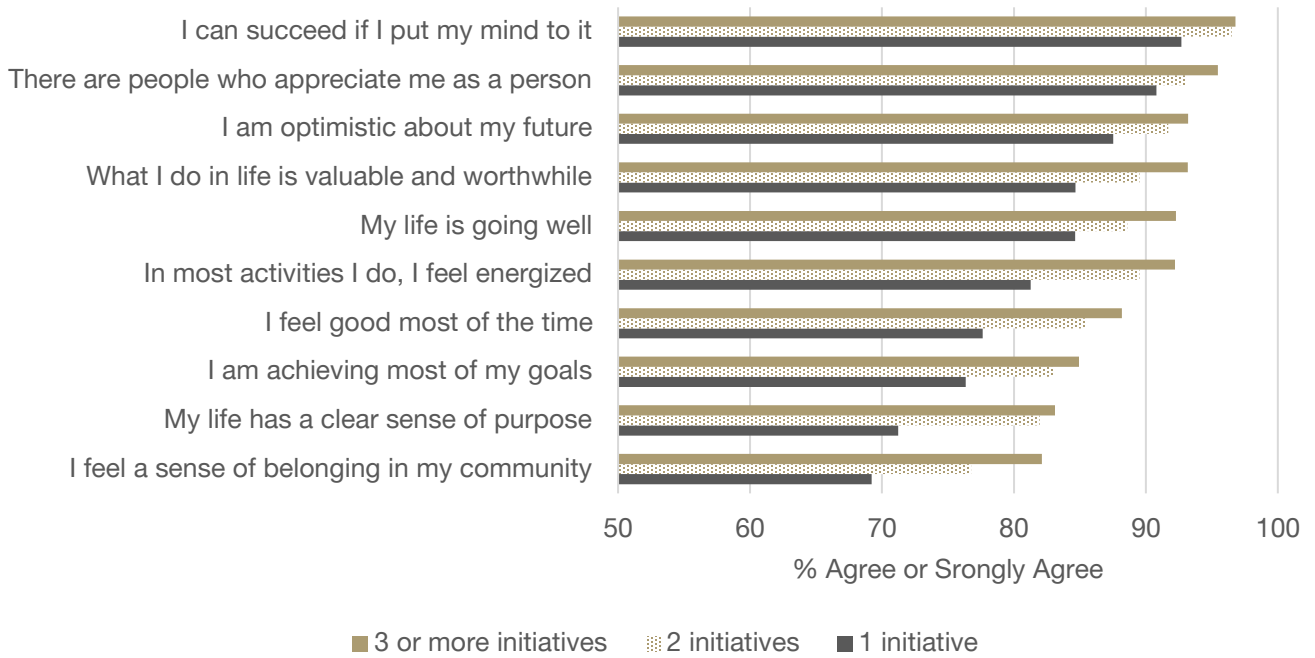
Mean Brief Inventory of Thriving Score by Number of Initiatives



<sup>19</sup> Gillham, J.E. and Seligman, M.E.P. (1999). Footsteps on the Road to A Positive Psychology. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 37. S163-S173.

<sup>20</sup> Where percentages are not displayed on the graph, refer to Appendix A

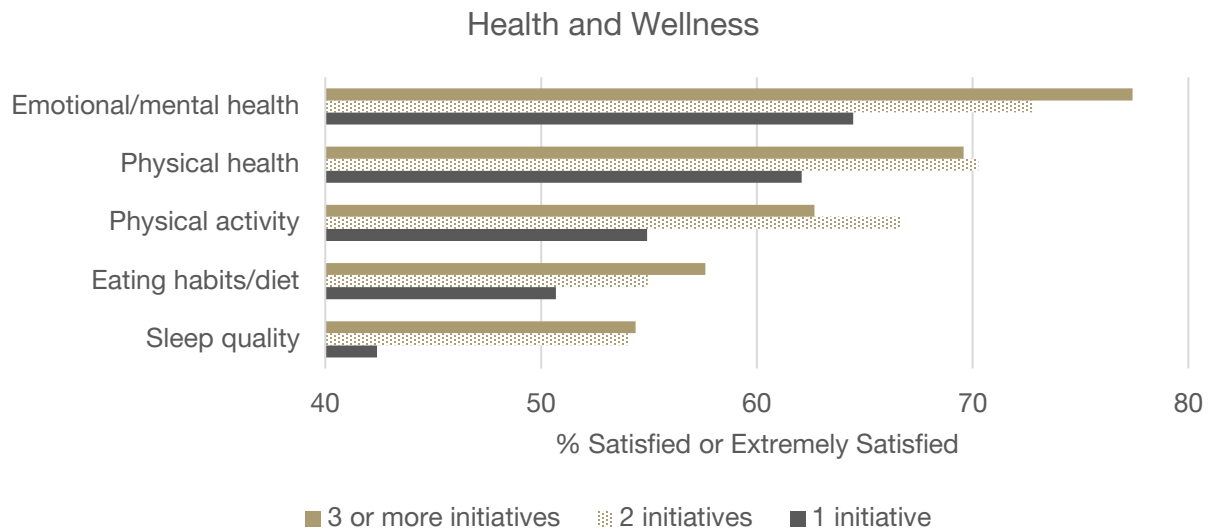
10-Question BIT Scale



Health

***“[TMF impact me in that] I feel better physically which helps me mentally feel better, as well.” – Active Duty Service Member***

As with connectedness and thriving, we found similar trends in the areas of physical and mental health. Those with greater engagement reported more satisfaction with their emotional and mental health. Also, across the board, members engaged in two or more initiatives reported greater physical health and healthy behaviors compared to those engaged in only one initiative. This finding is in line with the research on the connection between physical and mental health, as studies have found that physical health promotes better mental health. As one would expect, we found changes in physical health with some engagement and changes mental health with 3 or more initiatives. We see positive change after participation in only two initiatives for physical health and healthy behaviors, but additional engagement does not result in increasing physical health and healthy behaviors. However, mental health improvement continues with increased engagement.



### Resiliency

***“TMF has helped me look at hardship or suffering in a different light. None of the problems I have seem so big when I consider the stories of heroes such as Travis and the families that those heroes leave behind. TMF has made me more resilient.” – Active Duty Service Member***

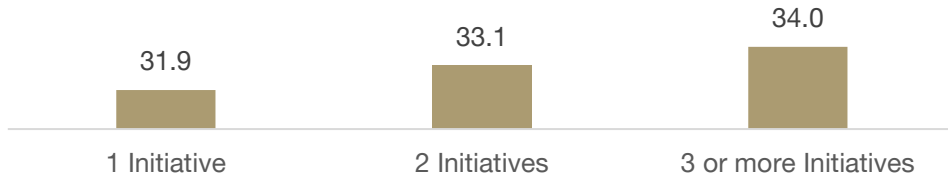
As with other areas of health and well-being we found higher resilience in those with greater TMF engagement.<sup>21</sup>

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10) was used to assess participant resiliency. CD-RISC-10 scores are out of a total of 40 points, where higher scores represent greater resiliency. Recently resiliency has been an area of focus for health and well-being researchers because like connectedness, it is correlated with important health and well-being outcomes. For example, resiliency has been shown to be a protective factor against post-traumatic stress (PTS), depression and anxiety.

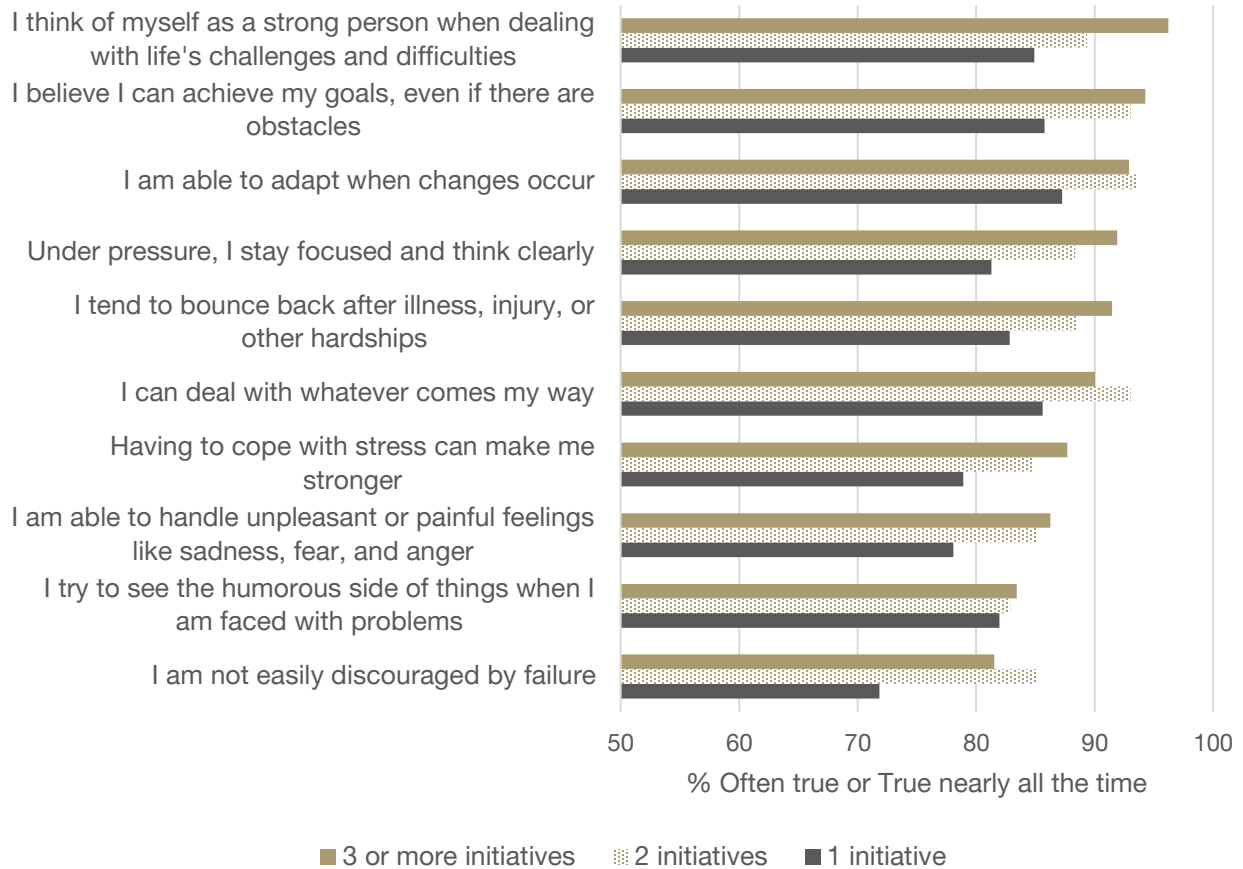
<sup>21</sup> We did not find the same increase in resilience with greater engagement for civilians.



Mean Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC) Score



10 Question Resilience Scale



## Character Does Matter

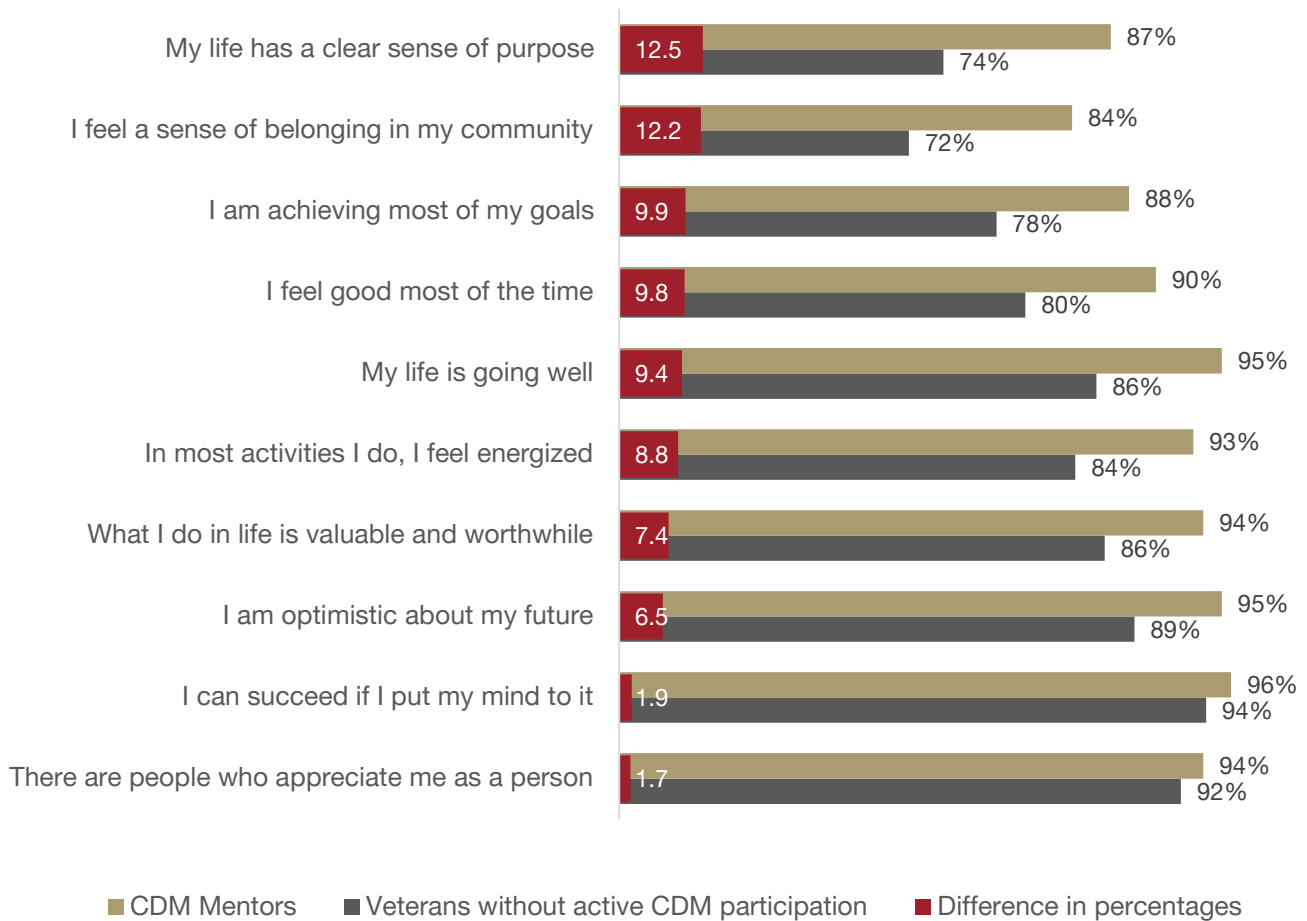
Veterans that participate in CDM have higher levels of thriving, emotional/mental health, and resiliency scores than veterans that do not participate in CDM. For example, 88% CDM Mentors, compared to 60% of Veteran non-CDM Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement with TMF has provided them with a sense of community. Similarly, 82% of CDM Mentors were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their emotional/mental health in the last 3 months, compared to 67% of Veteran non-CDM Mentors.

The CDM mentorship experience requires a sustained high degree of commitment and involvement with youth and other TMF staff relative to other TMF initiatives. Therefore, the experience of veterans and families of the fallen who served as a CDM Mentor was expected to be different from those who did not serve as Mentors. The Survey data supports this expectation across almost all of the areas of health and well-being.

Though we still see increases in health and well-being factors with greater engagement for all veterans, regardless of CDM Mentor status, the CDM Mentors have greater overall health and well-being scores than non-CDM veterans. However, CDM Mentors, that have only participated in CDM and no other TMF initiatives, generally have lower health and well-being scores compared to non-CDM veterans that have participated in only one initiative. Although there were only 19 CDM Mentors who only participated in CDM and no other initiative types, the mix of responses suggest the outcomes associated with this group cannot be entirely attributed to a few outliers. This trend could reflect possible variation in how CDM Mentors establish engagement with TMF or it could suggest that no single initiative, even CDM, solely contributes to the positive health and well-being outcomes observed in members. Nevertheless, the observation noted here will be further investigated.

The thriving elements most impacted by those who participated in CDM, 'My life has a clear sense of purpose' and 'I feel a sense of belonging in community,' were over 12 percentage points higher than non-CDM Mentors. The question element responses to 'I can succeed if I put my mind to it' and 'There are people who appreciate me as a person' were similar between CDM Mentors and veterans who were not CDM Mentors.

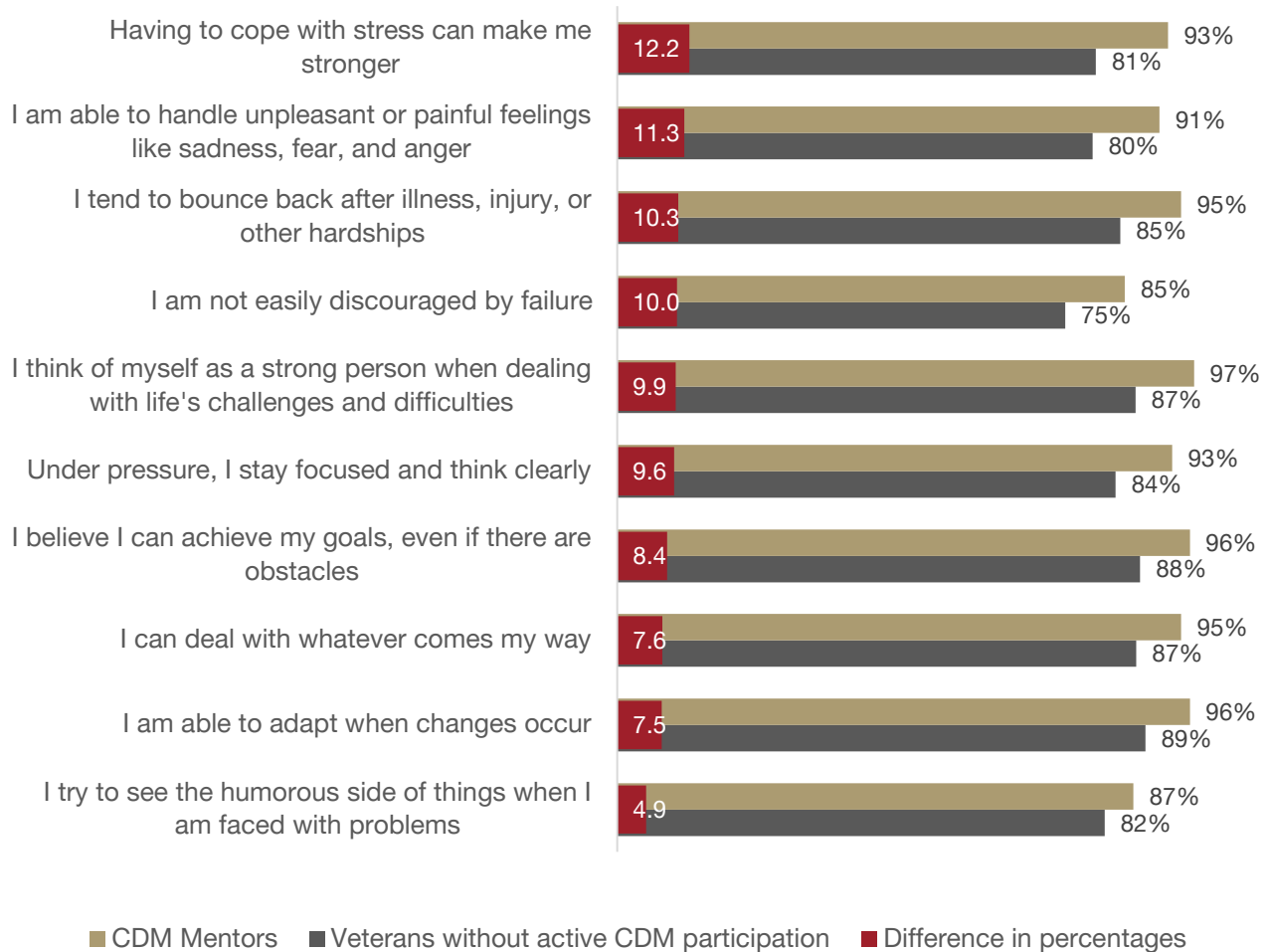
BIT: CDM Mentors vs. Veterans not CDM





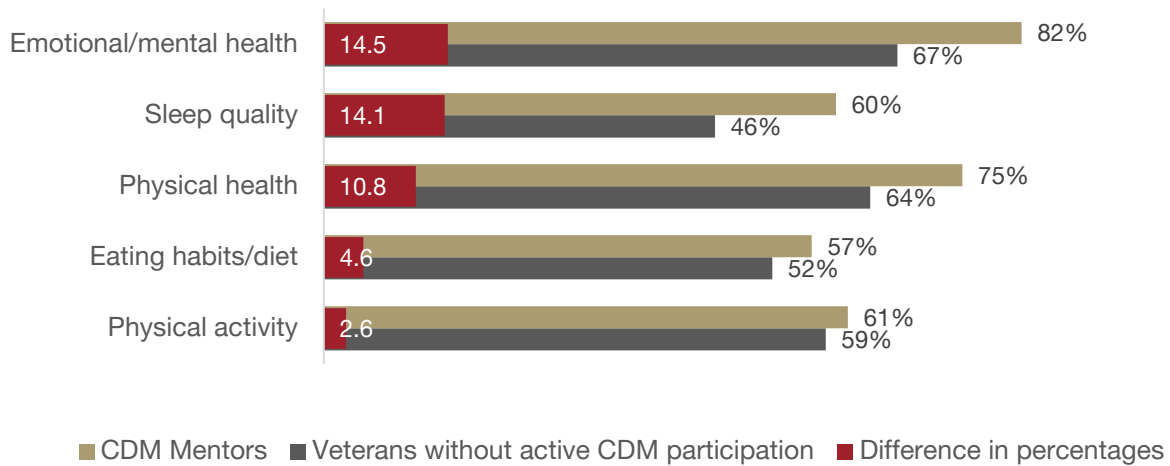
Resiliency elements were also different based on CDM Mentor participation. Those who served as CDM Mentors scored over 12 percentage points higher on the statement, ‘Having to cope with stress can make me stronger.’ Overall, CDM Mentors scored an average of 9 percentage points higher on resiliency questions than did veterans who did not participate in CDM.

Resilience: CDM Mentors vs. Veterans not CDM



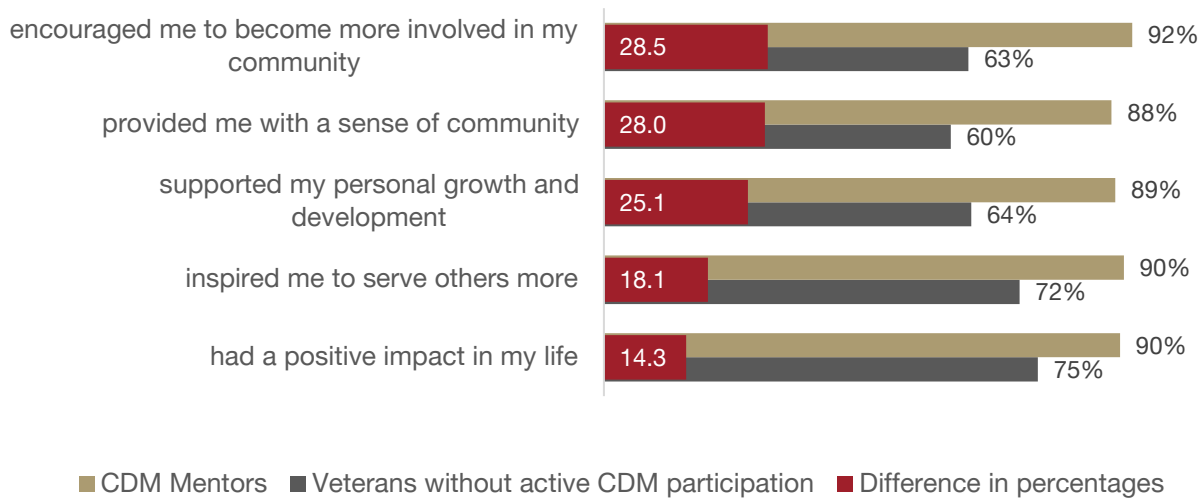
The greatest difference between CDM Mentors and veterans who were not CDM Mentors, across all scales, is most evident in the emotional/mental health and sleep quality questions. For example, 82% of CDM Mentors were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their emotional/mental health in the last 3 months, compared to 67% of veterans who were not CDM Mentors. Over a 14-point difference in emotional/mental health and sleep quality were seen among CDM Mentors.

Health and Wellness: CDM Mentors vs. Veterans not CDM



The questions assessing TMF experience had the greatest difference in scores. For example, 92% of CDM Mentors, compared to 63% of veteran who were not CDM Mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement with TMF encouraged them to become more involved in their community – a 28.5 difference in percentage points.

TMF Experience CDM Mentors vs. Veterans not CDM



TMF Experience

In the Survey we asked TMF members to report how their involvement with TMF has affected their lives. We found, as with health and well-being, that as TMF members engaged in more initiatives, they reported TMF had a more positive effect on their lives. This was particularly true in the area of connectedness – 91.8% and 90.8% of TMF members engaged in three or more initiatives reported that they ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ their involvement with TMF ‘inspired me to serve others’ and ‘encouraged me to become more involved in their community,’ respectively.

My involvement with TMF has...	1 initiative	2 initiatives	3 or more initiatives
had a positive impact in my life	69.4	84.2	91.8
inspired me to serve others more	65.7	80.8	91.8
encouraged me to become more involved in my community	56.4	72.2	90.8
supported my personal growth and development	58.4	70.8	85.5
provided me with a sense of community	54.2	69.5	84.5

The Survey data was supported by the open-ended comments of participants, below are some examples:

*“Being able to network and fellowship with other veterans. Being retired I miss the camaraderie from like minded individuals who share the same core values. With TMF you can find it.”*

*“Having my 11yr old son with me to volunteer our time to the TMF. I wanted him to be a part of something so much bigger than himself. He asked so many questions that day and engaged in activities that will help with his development into a good hard working young man. ”*

*“I attended a Leadership Expedition which has changed my perspective on life and encouraged me to do more even if those things are simple and small they can make a difference. ”*

*“Becoming a Veteran Mentor at TMF has impacted my life in the following ways; 1.) An enhanced sense of purpose in my community 2.) An increased positive outlook on my future and those around me 3.) I am more self-aware of my actions and how they effect other people. ”*

*Every year my experience is positive and I leave feeling enlightened and optimistic in my community. It makes me feel like people care about those around them and I am never alone. I get a sense of purpose and belonging. ”*

*“I am a better person because of TMF. I have been able to channel stress and heartbreak into positive encouraging activities that benefit my community. ”*

*“I feel that TMF has been the only organization that I found who lets me give back as well. We are a goldstar family and so many people give to us which we are grateful for. We also wanted to give back and TMF gives you that opportunity.”*

*“I feel TMF has given me a sense of courage and strength to step outside my comfort zone and it has also provided me with tools to make it through hardships when I know people have it worse than me.”*

*“The impact that TMF has had is that it got me out of the house got me moving and got me caring about people. I am able to participate in something that I Really believe in. ”*

*“[TMF] has given a great sense of community and has motivated me to be of service.”*

*“At each event I've been to I am always impressed with how many others are there to help the community fallen heroes and those still serving. It's great to see everyone come together for a shared purpose.”*

*“This has finally given me a sense of purpose. After losing my husband I have Wanted to get involved in keeping his memory alive while at the same time serving for a greater cause. I have Finally found a place where I can Do both with TMF.”*

## Discussion

***“TMF helps build necessary – and often rare – bridges between veteran and civilian communities.” – Military Veteran***

Increasingly fewer Americans personally know someone who has served in the US Military. As a result, a lack of awareness and understanding among civilians has grown, fostered by the promotion of misinformation and inaccurate perceptions of military service.<sup>22</sup> This disconnect between those who have served and their communities and those who have not and their communities have led to what is considered the Military-Civilian Divide or Gap. This division is a threat to the sustainment of our all-volunteer military force in many respects. As leaders have pondered remedies to mitigating this divide, a common thread is the need for civility, respect, and a coming together.<sup>23</sup>

### TMF Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide

TMF is unique among veterans serving organizations (VSOs) in that more than half of their member base is made up of civilians. Although TMF is centered on engaging veterans and families of the fallen, TMF also provides opportunities for civilian and youth engagement. Even though civilians may not participate in some TMF veteran specific initiatives, they report equally profound impact from their participation, as seen in this representative statement from a civilian:

*“Life-changing. TMF has given me a sense of purpose and inspired me to serve in all aspects of my life.”*

Most importantly, TMF brings people together to serve and build character – to be involved in work greater than themselves. Connections are made and relationships developed. TMF lays the groundwork to bring people together in respectfulness and friendship. It is hard to imagine TMF initiatives not breaking down the military civilian divide in their communities. This representative comment below made by a civilian speaks to this sentiment.

*“The feeling I get seeing people serve and stand side by side with people who start as strangers but end as what feels like friends it's the best feeling. Over time doing the same events and seeing those faces it's good.”*

Although the report focused on veteran health and well-being, civilians and military connected members had a similar experience. Civilians who participated in more initiative types also had higher thriving and health scores. The difference between civilians who participate in one initiative compared to civilians

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<sup>22</sup> Garamone, J. (2019, May 16). *DOD Official Cites Widening Military-Civilian Gap*. US Dept of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1850344/dod-official-cites-widening-military-civilian-gap/>

<sup>23</sup> Shane III, L. (2018, December 2). *Mattis' Fix for the civilian-military divide: Stop being jerks*. Military Times. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2018/12/02/mattis-fix-for-the-civilian-military-divide-stop-being-jerks>

who participate in three or more initiatives is smaller than the difference between veterans who participate in one initiative compared to those who participate in three or more.

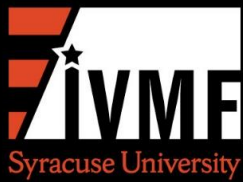
The health and well-being outcomes, trends in responses, and written sentiments were very similar to those from the previous year. This is especially encouraging since less than 10% took the survey twice, the experiences may be more representative than previously thought.

Limitations of the evaluation stem from the methods used and the assumptions made. The tool for this evaluation was a survey sent to members once each year, it was not designed to prove causality. Rather, the survey analysis illuminated a relationship between TMF participation and health and well-being. A small subset of the TMF member base responded to the survey (less than 5%). Veteran status is not known for all members. It is unknown how representative the civilian responses are of the larger member base of civilians, but the veterans and families of the fallen responses are more representative given a conservative estimate of at least a 10% response rate. The methods to determine engagement have focused on diversity of engagement and not repeated engagement with TMF initiatives. It is unknown how impactful repeated engagement is relative to diversity of engagements.

## **Conclusion**

Members engaged in a diversity of TMF initiatives, and especially those engaged with the CDM program, have increased mental and physical health and well-being scores. Over the two years that these scales have been used, the trends hold steady. The persistent dose response relationship of activity to health and well-being outcomes suggest that TMF impact may not rest in any single activity but might be best explained by the connectedness to community derived from engagement in the unique compilation of TMF initiatives. TMF members credit TMF with changing their lives, helping them transition from the military to civilian life, giving them hope, improving their physical and mental health, giving them a sense of purpose and meaning, and providing them with a community.

The next evaluation effort will couple the Annual Survey with case studies to understand how TMF members are impacted and what elements most contribute their positive outcomes. Given the strong anecdotal evidence that TMF is a contributor to the narrowing of the Military-Civilian divide, future evaluation will also explore how this is achieved and to what extent.



**Appendix A: Outcome Tables**

**BRIEF INVENTORY OF THRIVING**

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

	1 initiative		2 initiatives		3 or more initiatives		CDM Mentor	Not CDM
	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Vet or Civ	Veteran
My life has a clear sense of purpose	71.2	78.0	81.9	81.6	83.1	85.0	86.8	74.3
I am optimistic about my future	87.5	91.2	91.7	93.8	93.2	92.6	95.1	88.6
My life is going well	84.7	90.7	88.6	94.7	92.3	92.0	95.1	85.7
I feel good most of the time	77.6	87.9	85.5	92.2	88.2	92.6	90.2	80.4
What I do in life is valuable and worthwhile	84.7	90.8	89.5	93.5	93.2	93.2	93.8	86.4
I can succeed if I put my mind to it	92.7	94.7	96.5	97.8	96.8	97.5	95.8	94.0
I am achieving most of my goals	76.4	80.7	83.0	85.0	84.9	85.7	88.2	78.3
In most activities I do, I feel energized	81.3	88.4	89.5	92.8	92.2	90.7	93.0	84.2
There are people who appreciate me as a person	90.8	93.9	93.0	97.5	95.5	95.7	93.8	92.1
I feel a sense of belonging in my community	69.2	77.4	76.8	83.1	82.1	85.8	83.9	71.7





**HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

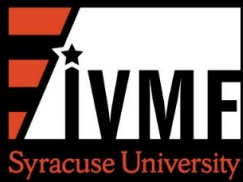
Over the last 3 months, how satisfied have you been with your...

	1 initiative		2 initiatives		3 or more initiatives	
	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians
Physical health	62.1	71.1	70.3	74.8	69.6	71.9
Emotional/mental health	64.5	74.6	72.9	79.7	77.4	68.8
Sleep quality	42.4	55.7	54.1	56.5	54.4	54.4
Eating habits/diet	50.7	57.0	55.0	60.0	57.6	56.9
Physical activity	54.9	65.6	66.7	68.1	62.7	73.8

CDM Mentor	Not CDM
Vet or Civ	Veteran
74.6	63.9
81.6	67.1
59.9	45.7
57.1	52.4
61.3	58.7





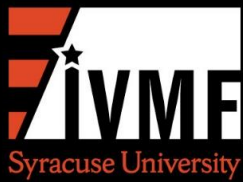


**RESILIENCY**

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements as they apply to you over the last month.

	1 initiative		2 initiatives		3 or more initiatives		CDM Mentor	Not CDM
	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Vet or Civ	Veteran
I am able to adapt when changes occur	87.3	88.1	93.5	91.5	92.9	90.3	96.4	88.9
I can deal with whatever comes my way	85.6	85.2	93.0	88.5	90.1	89.0	94.9	87.3
I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems	82.0	79.1	82.9	83.7	83.4	81.3	86.9	82.0
Having to cope with stress can make me stronger	78.9	77.4	84.7	79.3	87.7	80.7	92.7	80.5
I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships	82.8	87.7	88.4	88.8	91.5	89.0	94.9	84.6
I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles	85.8	90.0	93.0	92.2	94.3	91.6	96.4	88.0
Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly	81.3	80.5	88.4	82.4	91.9	87.0	93.4	83.8
I am not easily discouraged by failure	71.9	70.4	85.1	77.3	81.5	79.4	85.4	75.4
I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties	84.9	86.2	89.4	90.8	96.2	87.7	97.1	87.2
I am able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger	78.1	80.2	85.2	81.0	86.3	83.9	91.2	80.0



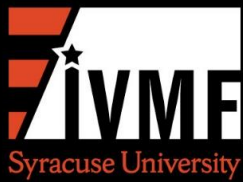


**TMF EXPERIENCE**

My involvement with TMF has...

	1 initiative		2 initiatives		3 or more initiatives		CDM Mentor	Not CDM
	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Vet or Civ	Veteran
encouraged me to become more involved in my community	56.4	54.3	72.2	71.8	90.8	84.1	91.9	63.4
provided me with a sense of community	54.2	58.4	69.5	68.9	84.5	89.4	88.2	60.3
had a positive impact in my life	69.4	73.8	84.2	84.6	91.8	96.0	89.7	75.4
inspired me to serve others more	65.7	68.3	80.8	81.3	91.8	91.4	90.4	72.3
supported my personal growth and development	58.4	61.1	70.8	74.5	85.5	86.8	88.9	63.8





**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

	1 initiative		2 initiatives		3 or more initiatives	
	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians	Veterans	Civilians
I get fully absorbed in activities I do	83.5	89.8	89.0	90.9	92.2	94.5
I get excited when I work on something	87.4	91.1	91.6	93.7	94.5	96.9
I have found a satisfactory meaning in my life	73.3	81.0	85.6	87.2	86.7	89.6
I know what gives meaning to my life	79.0	85.9	90.8	89.4	91.8	92.0
There are people who give me support and encouragement	89.8	92.8	89.2	96.1	93.5	96.3
My actions reflect my core values	92.5	94.8	93.7	97.1	95.8	97.5
I do not allow group pressure to control me	87.3	86.3	91.0	88.0	92.1	91.9
My morals guide what I do as a leader	95.5	96.6	96.8	97.4	98.1	98.1
For me, my community is a good fit	72.2	78.4	79.6	83.4	82.9	86.2
My community is important to me	86.6	88.0	91.9	95.7	93.0	95.0
I feel good helping the members of my community	94.0	94.2	96.8	98.1	97.7	98.8

CDM Mentor	Not CDM
Vet or Civ	Veteran
93.8	85.4
96.5	88.9
89.6	77.1
92.4	83.0
92.3	90.2
96.5	93.2
93.7	88.3
97.2	96.3
81.7	75.1
92.3	88.6
97.2	95.0

