



2021 TMF YOUTH IMPACT REPORT_

COMPILED USING RESEARCH CONDUCTED
BY THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND
MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF)



VETERAN MENTORS POSITIVELY ALTER BEHAVIORS IN YOUTH, CREATE AGENTS OF CHANGE THROUGH CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM

POWERED BY



RESEARCH FINDINGS_

Research gathered by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) indicates several positive outcomes of the Character Does Matter program including:

1. Veteran Mentors positively impact students' behaviors and attitudes by promoting growth in areas such as: self-reflection, confidence, goal-setting, leadership, and service.
2. After completing the CDM program, young adults become agents of change who then go on to positively influence their school culture and local communities.





METHODOLOGY_

Since August 2018, the IVMF at Syracuse University has partnered with Travis Manion Foundation to measure the impact of the CDM program. This report shares the research and findings from the last three years of program evaluation and draws conclusions about the short- and long-term effects on youth as a result of their participation. These findings are drawn from self-reporting surveys, open-response questions, and live interviews with more than 200 CDM students as well as several teachers, faculty, Veteran Mentors and local civic leaders familiar with the program.



ALTERING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS, CREATING AGENTS OF CHANGE_

According to research from the IVMF, Veteran Mentors in the CDM program have a measurable positive impact on youth attitudes and behaviors. Self-reporting from pre- and post-program surveys as well as student open-response questions reveal that students consistently report higher levels of satisfaction in categories such as educational expectations and pro-social behavior, and a decrease in negative attitudes toward risk, like drinking alcohol and truancy (see graph on pg. 10). Further, students surveyed experienced noticeable improvement in six categories related to character development: self-reflection, confidence, goal-setting, service, leadership, and becoming agents of change.

MEASURED AREAS OF GROWTH

SELF-REFLECTION_

On anonymous surveys at the conclusion of the CDM program, students from the four schools participating in IVMF's study were asked if they experienced any personal benefits from the program and to detail what those were. Comments most frequently centered around themes of improved self-understanding and reflection, as well as an increased understanding of others.

The benefits of completing this program are endless! I learned so much about myself and how I can improve my life and the lives of those around me.

I got a better understanding of myself and my community. I got a perspective of what I want to be in the future and how I want to help my community.

It was able to teach us different things about our life and to improve ways of communicating; a better understanding of who we are and what our life's purpose is.

The activities and conversations we have make me think deeper into things. It's shaping the students in our school to be leaders.

Survey responses indicate that the push toward self-reflection is not a by-product of the program, but rather an intentional outcome. Employing the CDM curriculum, Veteran Mentors encourage students to consider their personal character strengths and what contributions they can make to improve their environments:

CDM activities done right are touchstone events in the most formative years of a young adult's life that serve to energize his/her interest in becoming the best version of him/herself. TMF enhances the student's understanding of character-building as a process, appreciation for the benefits of self-reflection, and belief in his/her ability to make positive impacts in the lives of others.

— Veteran Mentor

CONFIDENCE_

Another observable outcome experienced by students in the program, are increased levels of self-confidence. Several teachers interviewed by IVMF pointed this out, noting that it often led to a new bias toward action in youth. Students who had previously been content to sit on the sidelines were now actively and positively engaging with one another, with their Mentors, with the curriculum, and with their community at large. This notion was echoed by Veteran Mentors and the students themselves.

And I think the best part of it is, these are adults [Mentors] who expect them to participate. I've noticed a lot of people are hesitant about interacting with teenagers. I'm sure they've had bad experiences somewhere else. But TMF volunteers basically come in and expect that the teenager is going to speak and participate. And by God, they do. It's really a lovely, very spontaneous experience to see.

— School Administrator for a CDM Program

One way that I have seen the students change is by them gaining more confidence in themselves. That can be that they are more open to having their camera on [during Zoom meetings] or being quicker at jumping into a conversation. In addition, I have also seen them step in joining other groups or being teen mentors for local youth summits.

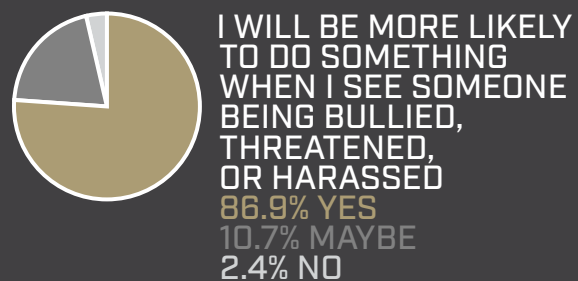
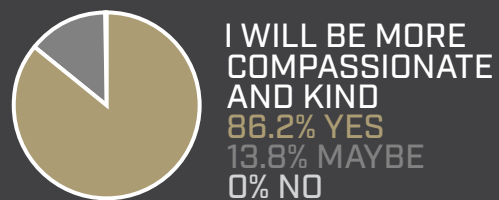
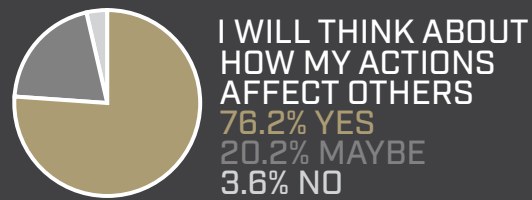
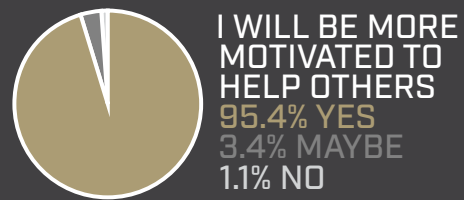
— Veteran Mentor

In the program, I had the ability to interact with others more than usual and gain enough courage to engage in activities or other teamwork-involving projects. I was able to de-stress and find motivation after listening to the inspiring stories of the Mentors.

— High School Student

DATA FROM 171 YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN THE CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM

REPORTED THAT “BECAUSE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THE CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM...”



MEASURED AREAS OF GROWTH (CONT.)

GOAL-SETTING AND INCREASED EXPECTATIONS_

Within the anonymous survey, the IVMF research team also asked students to consider what they intend to do moving forward, to implement the lessons learned in the program. Responses frequently emphasized specific goals to serve the local community or focus on self-improvement.

I will start volunteering for more things to help out people and the environment, because “If Not Me, Then Who...”

I want to achieve my goal to study more, 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.

LEADERSHIP_

Local civic leaders familiar with the impact of the CDM program commented on its ability to successfully develop leadership skills in youth, and inspire them to work toward higher levels of leadership serving the public.



Within the 1st Congressional District of Pennsylvania, with whom I represent in Congress, Travis Manion Foundation’s Character Does Matter program is truly having an impact developing young adults into leaders who want to serve others and improve our country. Each year I receive

many requests for nomination to a Service Academy and many of them cite TMF’s character program as their inspiration. These young adults learn at a young age the value of being a person of character and how to use that in order to serve others through the military or other forms of public service.

— Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick

Students who participate in the CDM program themselves frequently reported involvement in external activities that cultivated their sense of leadership as well. During the 2020 school year, of 32 students surveyed from various schools, 27 (or 84%) reported participation in at least one leadership activity since beginning CDM. Of the group, 28% had taken a leadership position in a school club or sport since joining the program. As one student noted in an anonymous survey:

I was able to strengthen my leadership skills and I was able to grow as a leader throughout this course. This course challenged me to be my best self that I could be.

The concept that students were introduced to leadership, and then acted on that leadership to improve their schools or communities, was echoed by several teachers who serve as liaisons between the Veteran Mentors who administer the program, the students who participate, and the host school or organization.

Students did report that because of their experiences with TMF, that they have been a lot more inclined to take on leadership roles in particular. There was an example of a student, who was very reserved, and after going through the workshops and after some time, she made the connections between the slogan, “If not me, then who?” and started a club on campus, in environmental sciences focused on climate change. She was able to relate it back and say, “Through my experience with TMF, that actually was teaching me that I do have a capacity to take on these roles and to get a group of people together and make it happen.”

In my experience, the vast majority of the students that we serve are a bit reserved and don’t have this idea that there is something of a calling, if you will, or something of a service or that they can contribute. And so, a lot of what our summer program has been about is introducing them to those ideas. And the TMF has done a fantastic job in introducing that as a general theme.

— College staff

Since January of 2020, we have had an impactful partnership to develop young adults into people of character who go on to serve as change agents within Burlington-Edison High School and the Skagit Valley area of Washington State... It is clear that after going through the program, youth are inspired to take on bigger leadership roles such as leadership positions within the Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (NJROTC) and other extracurricular activities and sports teams. These young adults truly become the student leaders that influence their peers to act with integrity, kindness, and fairness.

— High School Principal



84%

OF STUDENTS SURVEYED REPORTED PARTICIPATION IN AT LEAST ONE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY SINCE BEGINNING CDM





MEASURED AREAS OF GROWTH (CONT.)

SERVICE_

Of students interviewed from various schools in 2020, 50% had participated in or led a service project since joining the CDM program. One school administrator interviewed by the IVMF noted that participation in the program is, for many students, the first time they are introduced to community service, and/or they are enthusiastic about supporting it. Here she discusses how she had previously struggled to fill volunteer spots, but how that changed after the implementation of CDM:

"AFTER THIS IDEA OF CONTRIBUTING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY WAS INTRODUCED BY THE TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION, WE HAVE NO TROUBLE FILLING SPOTS. I THINK THERE WERE 30 STUDENTS WANTING TO VOLUNTEER AT A LOCAL RUN AND WE HAD TO CAP IT AT 20... IT'S THIS IDEA THAT: YOU MEET PEOPLE, YOU LEARN NEW THINGS, YOU FEEL GOOD ABOUT GIVING BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY. AND SO, IT'S INTRODUCING VOLUNTEERISM IN A VERY, VERY POSITIVE WAY."

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Local leaders in law enforcement have also commented on the program's ability to activate students to serve local communities.



Since 2015, TMF and the New Jersey State Police have had an important and impactful partnership to develop young adults into people of character that serve as change agents within their school and community. Through my personal experience as a Mentor, I have seen how Character Does Matter develops youth to improve positive behaviors,

reduce negative behaviors, and become agents of change. After going through the program with me and many of the troopers in our organization, youth are inspired to serve others and live Travis' motto, "If Not Me, Then Who...," from everyday acts of kindness to large-scale service projects. I've seen first-hand how these actions change the culture of a school and influence the outlook for an entire community. I have witnessed many of these young men and women inspire

their classmates and complete service projects even during the pandemic in which they collected several hundred protective masks that were distributed to a local war veterans association. Another prime example of this took place in Pleasantville, NJ, which has been hard hit by poverty and a lack of resources. That day, I shared inspiring stories with a group of young adults about people demonstrating good character. My fellow Mentors and I followed that discussion by joining with the youth to do a service project together to clean up their community recreational center. I saw these young adults truly take pride in their volunteer work and feel a deep sense of responsibility to be the change they sought within their community. And I know from keeping in touch with the Pleasantville Police Chief that this was not a single event but the start of a life of service for these young adults.

— Colonel Al Ponenti,
New Jersey State Police

50%

**HAD PARTICIPATED
IN OR LED A
SERVICE PROJECT
SINCE JOINING THE
CDM PROGRAM**



CREATING AGENTS OF CHANGE_

Research conducted by the IVMF indicates that the outcomes for student participants in the CDM program are not limited to the students themselves. While data shows that individual students experience personal benefits including improved confidence, new proficiencies and skill sets, deeper connections to others, and more positive behaviors; it is also true that those same students are the producers of additional outcomes for others, going on to be agents of change within their schools and communities. This outcome is observed within individual interviews with students, as well as local leaders familiar with the CDM program.



Within the 8th Congressional District of Pennsylvania with whom I represented in Congress, I've had the unique opportunity to see the Travis Manion Foundation's Character Does Matter program at work. I've followed the organization and its character program closely over the years, and one profound outcome I've observed is the way in which students who enter the program are prepared to take on some of our community's greatest challenges, by bringing people of different backgrounds together. ... From lifting up underserved youth while also educating the majority about fairness and equality, Travis Manion Foundation's Character Does Matter program plays an important role making real change in one of the defining problems of our generation. Through empowering youth, TMF is creating the next generation of leaders that will ensure long-term, sustainable positive change.

— Patrick Murphy
Former Congressman and 33rd Under Secretary of the Army



SCHOOL CASE STUDIES_

TMF CLUBS

One way that students go on to influence their surrounding culture and community, is through the establishment of a Travis Manion Foundation Club at the conclusion of the CDM program. As of February 2021, there are 9 TMF clubs that are operational in schools throughout the country. These clubs are founded by students who participated in CDM. The clubs' express purpose is to first and foremost serve the community, while many also provide continued peer mentorship and personal development resources to fellow students. After the club founder moves on or graduates, the service club remains intact as an alumni system for other students who are going through the program or interested in service generally.

EXAMPLE CLUB - "THE TMF HAWKS" AT SCHOOL D

TMF held their first CDM program at School D in fall 2014. In spring 2015, students came together to form the TMF Hawks Club for past and current students within the program that met on a weekly basis. The stated mission of the club is to "catalyze the application of leadership through service in every student at [School D]." It is notable that the club's mission is to positively influence even those students who do not participate in CDM at School D and that service is the primary means of doing so.

ACTIVITIES OF THE TMF HAWKS INCLUDE:

- Providing additional reading and video resources around character development and leadership
- Coordinating a speaker series where former students who are now in college come back to speak to current students about how they continue to live the CDM principles
- Hosting a Veterans Appreciation Week in the fall, even coordinating with veteran graduates of the school to participate
- Organizing service projects throughout the year that activate more 300 fellow students

TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION SERVICE CLUBS

NOTRE DAME PREPARATORY SCHOOL
TOWSON, MD

ST. MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL
ANNAPOLIS, MD

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
OXFORD, MI

CENTRAL BUCKS EAST HIGH SCHOOL
DOYLESTOWN, PA

SAINT JOSEPH'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL
PHILADELPHIA, PA

CORONADO HIGH SCHOOL
CORONADO, CA

CHAMPS CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
VAN NUYS, CA

SAN CLEMENTE HIGH SCHOOL
SAN CLEMENTE, CA

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO
SAN DIEGO, CA

HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL
WAKE FOREST, NC

THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT IS FROM AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY THE IVMF RESEARCH TEAM WITH A TEACHER AT SCHOOL D ABOUT STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE TMF HAWKS CLUB:

[ON STUDENTS ORGANIZING A LEADERSHIP EVENT WITH LOCAL VETERANS]

They want to continue conversations and learn about leadership, and they want to create opportunities for service, for application of generosity and integrity and courage and really just moving beyond the self in terms of growth. Each year we try to build a program, and each senior class of TMF Clubs wants to leave a legacy -- that's pretty clear. Last year's really gifted us the legacy of Veterans Appreciation Week and leadership week. So, Veterans Appreciation Week, obviously is in November, around Thursday, and leadership week is around when Travis Manion was killed in April, that they created last year, it's five days of talks. Five days of panel conversations with TMF Mentors, paired with [school] grads who are civilians or veterans. It's just phenomenal. And the TMF Clubs themselves, facilitate those conversations. They've developed the scripts, they write the bios for each speaker. It's phenomenal ... And then, the students gained confidence, and then really the TMF Clubs became these leaders having discussions with leaders. We did debriefs, and [the students] were reflecting on their rigidity, and their nervousness, and they're like, we want to try it again. This is the growth mindset attached to just them facilitating ... And they don't just talk amongst themselves; they expect each other to engage in service.

[ON STUDENTS NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC AND CONTINUING TO SERVE]

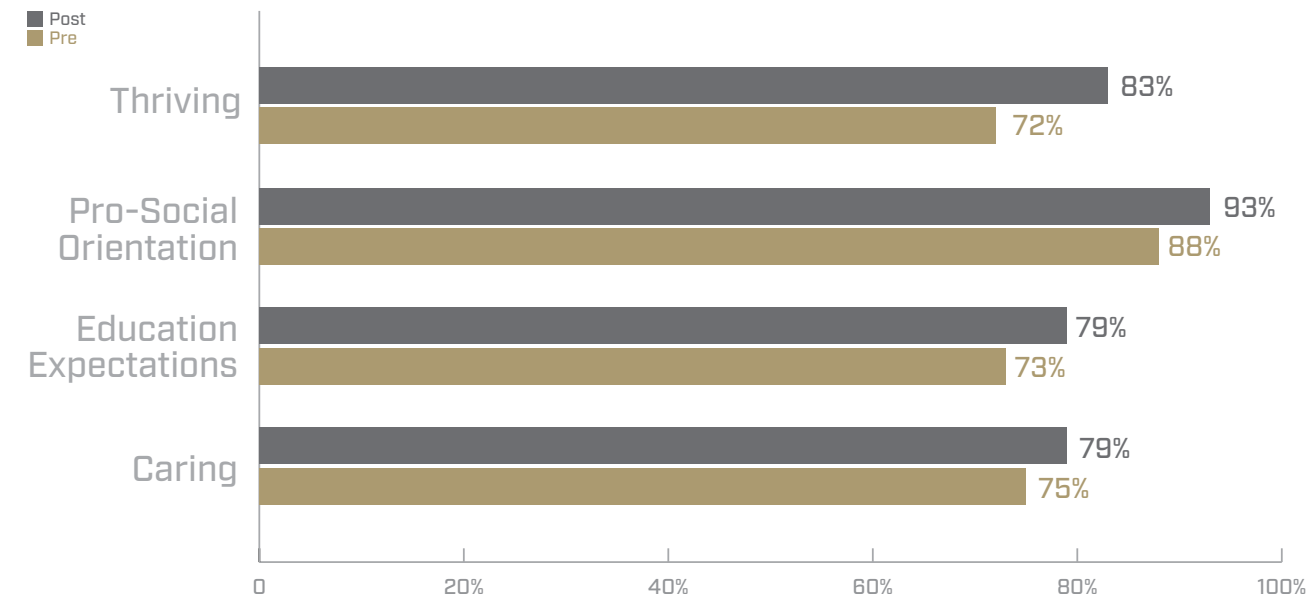
TMF Clubs, instead of just deciding in the midst of this pandemic, in the first semester of this year to act like it wasn't going on, they were like, there's a need here. The fact that they recognized that there was a particular need for students to engage with peers, because we were shifting just so radically from hybrid to virtual because nothing was consistent in this last phase of 2020. The fact that they designed, they created, they requested, they envisioned a space for their peers who had not yet done TMF to offer it to them is a testament to their being a cut above maybe those who are not in TMF. I'm talking about those TMF peer leaders in particular. ... They're like, wait, I am a leader, whether I identify as one or not, I am leading, what does that look like now for me in the home space with my family? And we've been through this pandemic now since March [2020]. What does this mean for me in my local community with how I can serve, if not through [school] channels, because we're not at [school] in the physical space? Or there's a need more locally? What can I do? ... I think they just have a raised consciousness more than other students about what their call is as a leader in the home. They're not like drawing up this narrative of victimhood, when they could. They are taking action in the moment given the context to be a leader in various small ways in the home space, and dial into that into a more local space even, and I'm even talking more than [school], but in their local community. Instead they're connected with each other to draw inspiration about what they can do.



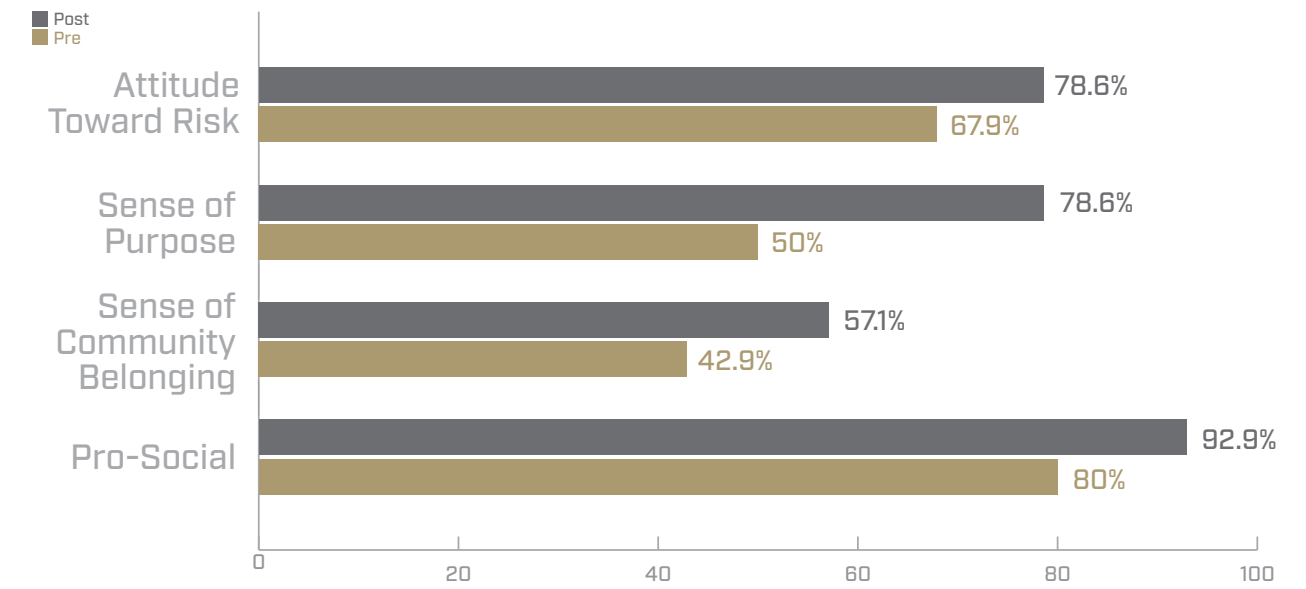
SCHOOL DATA

The graphs below chart the changes in students from 4 sample high schools that participated in the CDM program between September 2019 and December 2020. Students at the schools saw improvements in measures related to personal thriving, pro-social orientation, educational expectations, and caring. They also reported higher levels of community belonging and sense of purpose.

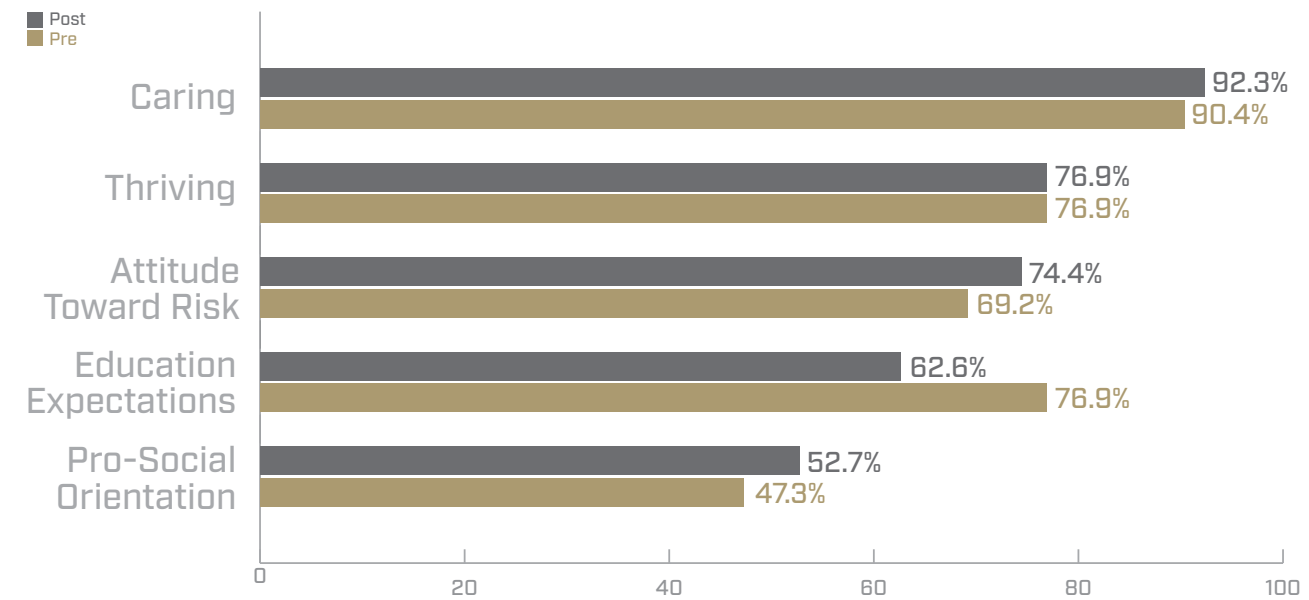
SCHOOL A



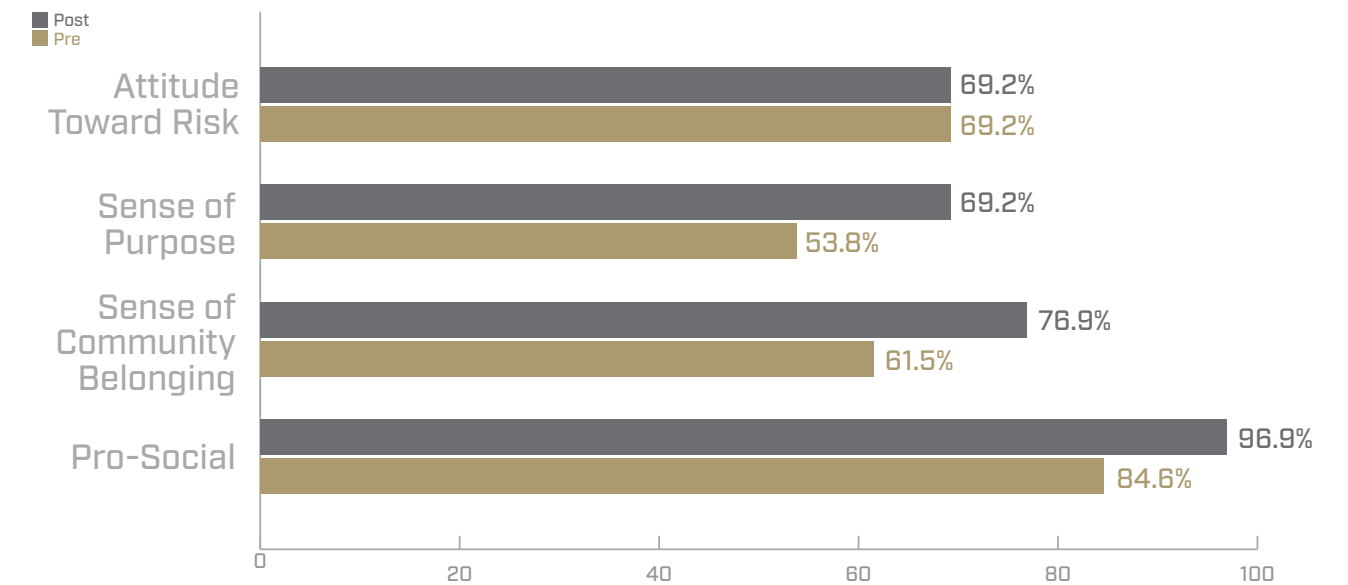
SCHOOL C



SCHOOL B



SCHOOL D





INDIVIDUAL STUDENT CASE STUDIES

As part of their exhaustive research, the IVMF conducted interviews with individual students who had been involved with the program in high school for an average of two to three years. Now in college or on their way to college, these students reflected on how the CDM program informed their personal development in high school and beyond.



STUDENT 1
19 YEARS OLD
3 YEARS INVOLVEMENT WITH CDM
COLLEGE STUDENT
MALE

- Following CDM, began organizing several service projects, including a food bank drive for fellow students, an Earth Day Cleanup at a local park, weeding around school grounds, and visiting local senior residents
- Quote from IVMF interview: "A lot of what I learned from Travis Manion [Foundation] was how to be an effective communicator and manager of projects. So I would communicate with other project leaders [on a service project] but also, learn how to manage the project as a whole. I learned that, as I progressed, it was hard. I had to tap into the idea of teamwork ... learning how to work more cohesively, understanding everybody else, and making sure things are coordinated and streamlined."



STUDENT 2
18 YEARS OLD
2.5 YEARS INVOLVEMENT
HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR
MALE

- Credits the CDM program with encouraging him to take a leadership role on his team and keeping his teammates accountable; cites his Veteran Mentor's feedback as critical to his personal growth
- Quote from IVMF interview: "So, I feel like those skills [learned in CDM] definitely have helped me get to the position of team captain and then, there's also been some conflicts and stuff this year that I've had to use those skills in my position. There was a teammate of mine who was cutting corners. He was skipping the warmup, not really doing what's expected of him and it came to a point where he got ejected from one of our practices just because he wasn't meeting even the minimum requirements. So, I kind of took the team around and I was like, 'We don't want to isolate this guy, but we need to learn from his mistakes.' When he returned, I spoke with him personally about what would be expected of him. I thought it would be very important for me to set that kind of precedent especially for the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors ... And [Veteran's name] was also a huge mentor for me because he was very unbashful about telling me what I was doing right and doing wrong. And it was kind of like I needed to hear that because a lot of the times, it's difficult to give people negative feedback, but he was very forward with that and I really appreciated it. And I grew from the errors that I was making."



STUDENT 3
18 YEARS OLD,
3 YEARS INVOLVEMENT WITH CDM
HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR
FEMALE

- Began the program as a shy student but was emboldened to take more leadership roles after completing CDM; now serves a peer mentor in JROTC and oversees students throughout the district
- Quote from IVMF interview: "CDM definitely [strengthened] my leadership skills because before I was very shy and I didn't really know how to work as a group. But then as we dove deep into ourselves, and pointing out our characteristics, good and bad, I've been able to use the good parts and be able to lead as a group as well as in many other things like clubs and teams. And currently, I am on the board for our school district for ROTC. I have become a senior mentor to the younger cadets within the program. That was my main focus within the ROTC. And now, I oversee all the cadets within the district. [I talk to them about character strengths] like if they were having issues, I'd say, 'Hey, what's wrong?' And they're like, 'I'm struggling with this, this and this.' And I'd be like, 'OK, how do we solve this? How are we going to resolve these certain issues in a matter that's non-aggressive?' And we can all work together collectively as a team to get things done."



ABOUT THE CHARACTER DOES MATTER PROGRAM AT TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION_

Character Does Matter (CDM) is a character development and leadership initiative for youth that leverages military veterans and families of fallen heroes to serve as Mentors on school campuses, within youth sports teams, and through young adult extracurricular activities and organizations. Military veterans and survivors serve as volunteers that are identified, vetted, trained, and supported by TMF staff to deliver the proprietary CDM curriculum. They submit to extensive background checks and receive thorough training in topics related to youth mentorship that include public speaking, classroom management, and discussion and activity facilitation.

Outside of the hard skills they obtain during training, Veteran and Survivor Mentors bring a wealth of experience in selfless service, leadership, and community-building that they impart on the youth they work with.

The long-term goal of CDM is to create agents of change to improve local communities through service. The model begins by empowering veterans and survivors and reconnecting them with their communities to serve youth, and ends with those youth going on to lead and serve others.

PROGRAM MILESTONES,
CALENDAR YEAR 2020

1,834
VETERANS AND SURVIVORS
SERVING AS MENTORS

50,155
STUDENTS IMPACTED
THIS YEAR