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# The Impact of TMF Initiatives on Thriving and Well-Being – Travis Manion Foundation Character & Leadership Course Pilot Evaluation Report

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

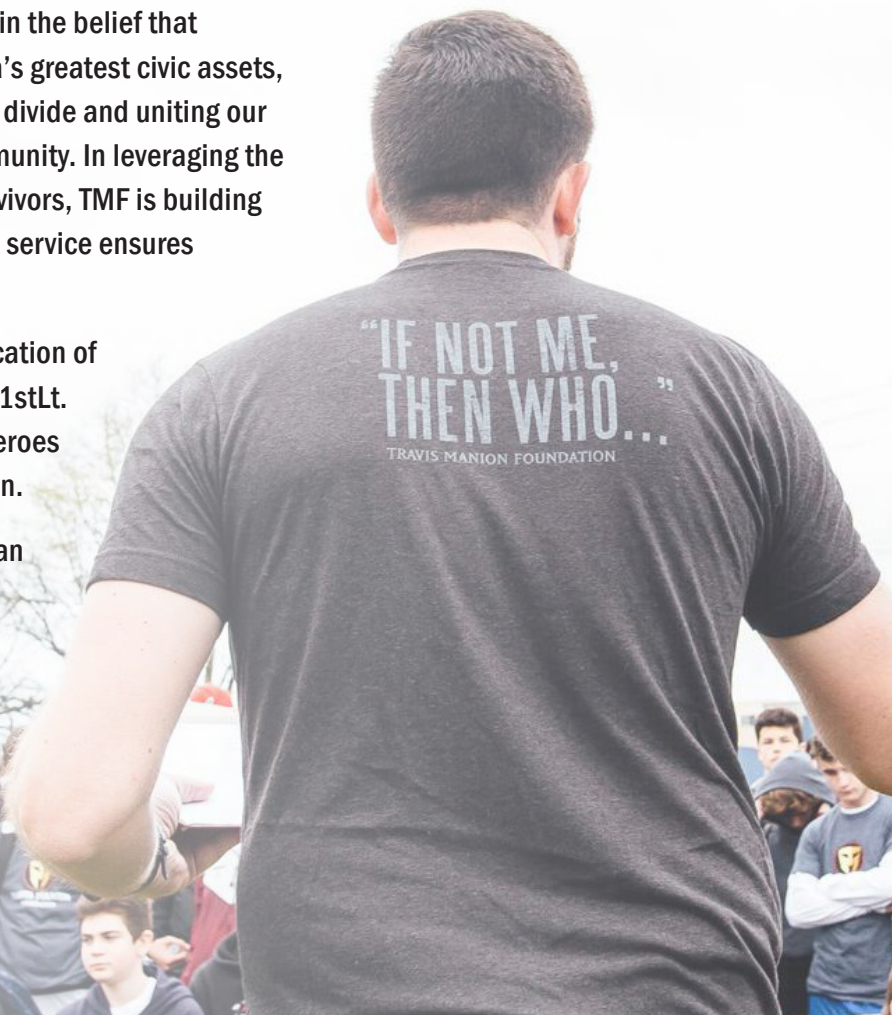
A Summary of Findings in Collaboration with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

# The Impact of TMF Initiatives on Thriving and Well-Being

The work of Travis Manion Foundation (TMF) is rooted in the belief that veterans and families of the fallen are among America's greatest civic assets, and that the path toward bridging the civilian-military divide and uniting our communities begins by empowering our military community. In leveraging the skills, experience, and leadership of veterans and survivors, TMF is building a nation of strong, character-driven individuals whose service ensures that our families, communities, and country thrive.

Through TMF's initiatives, along with the tireless dedication of its members, TMF honors the legacy of its namesake, 1stLt. Travis Manion, U.S. Marine Corps, and all the fallen heroes who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation.

On April 29, 2007, 1stLt. Travis Manion was killed by an enemy sniper while saving his wounded teammates. Before leaving for his second and final deployment to Iraq, Travis described his sense of duty in one simple but powerful statement: "If Not Me. Then Who..."





# STUDY OF THRIVING & WELL-BEING

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 to individual and community thrive and well-being.

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.

Measuring the degree of individual thriving and well-being can be difficult. Thus, in an effort to capture and communicate impact, TMF reached out to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) to evaluate the effectiveness of TMF initiatives on improving the level of thriving and well-being among participating veterans, families of the fallen, and civilian members.

Individual thriving and well-being can be assessed through validated measures and scales.

For this study, the evaluation team used the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) scale to determine the effect that program participation may have on individual thriving and well-being.

## KEY FINDINGS

### MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Veterans and families of the fallen who were involved in three or more different types of TMF initiatives were significantly more likely to report higher levels of emotional and mental health and have a better quality of sleep than those who only participated in one type of TMF initiative.

### TMF'S CHARACTER DOES MATTER

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

### PARTICIPATING IN A MYRIAD OF TMF INITIATIVES INCREASES THRIVING

Veterans and families of the fallen who participated in three or more different types of TMF initiatives have the highest levels of thriving. Civilian members experienced a similar level of thriving through TMF participation.

## TMF INITIATIVES

### CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM)

Through the CDM initiative, veterans and families of the fallen mentor youth—aged 12-18—to develop character in future generations, by drawing from their leadership experience. Veteran Mentors aggregate stories from their personal lives and are trained to deliver a character development curriculum that gives youth positive role models and encourages them to adopt the “If Not Me, Then Who...” mantra.

### LEADING WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

Grounded in the evidence-based field of Positive Psychology, ‘Leading With Your Strengths’ workshops provide best-in-class personal development and leadership training that help veterans learn their strengths, uncover their purpose, and tell their story—key factors on the path toward thriving. When veterans identify passions and leverage their strengths, they thrive individually, and that impact ripples throughout their families, workplaces, and communities at large.

### EXPEDITIONS

TMF provides veterans and family members of fallen heroes the opportunity to connect, build relationships, and work together on service-based trips, both international and domestic. Through expeditions, participants continue their healing journey with others in similar experiences, receive training and empowerment resources, and continue the legacies of fallen heroes through meaningful service projects around the world.

### 9/11 HEROES RUN

More than 55 volunteer-led domestic and international 5K runs unite communities and honor the legacy of the heroes of Sept. 11 and the wars since. Each year on or near 9/11, volunteers who have answered the call of “If Not Me, Then Who...” unite with their communities to organize the runs on behalf of TMF, welcoming runners, walkers, and ruckers of all levels and ages.

### OPERATION LEGACY

Operation Legacy is a national movement of service that leverages the servant leadership of veterans and families of the fallen while addressing communities' most critical needs. TMF galvanizes volunteers through the “If Not Me, Then Who...” mantra to lead service projects in their own backyards, including: cleaning up parks, planting trees in honor of fallen warriors, rehabilitating homes, and more.

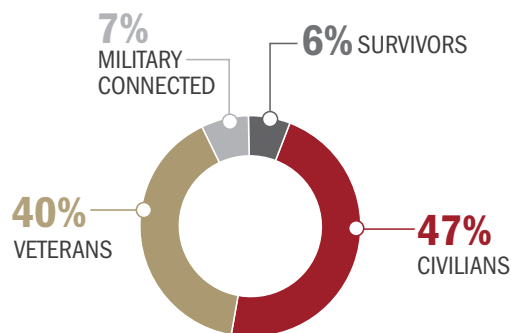


# ANNUAL SURVEY AND THRIVING

The IVMF conducted TMF's first annual survey in October 2018 using the 10-question Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT) scale along with supplementary questions about health, leadership, and community engagement.

The annual survey was sent to the entire TMF membership base:

**2,278**  
TOTAL RESPONDENTS



## REASONS RESPONDENTS JOINED TMF

*"To honor our heroes or a loved one"* **70%**  
*"To serve their community and/or others."* **47%**

Additionally, 35% of members stated that they participated in more than one TMF initiative and 15% stated involvement in three or more initiatives.

## ANNUAL SURVEY | DETAILED FINDINGS & HIGHLIGHTS OF THOSE INVOLVED IN TMF INITIATIVES



### PARTICIPATION, THRIVING, & COMMUNITY

- ✓ **AS PARTICIPATION IN THE NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TMF INITIATIVES INCREASED, SO DID PARTICIPANTS' LEVELS OF THRIVING.** Using the BIT to describe thrive, veterans, families of the fallen, and civilians showed significant increases in thriving with involvement in three or more TMF initiatives.
- ✓ **PEOPLE WHO JOINED TMF SHOWED A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THEIR SENSE OF COMMUNITY, LIFE PURPOSE, AND MEANING** from when they took the pre-survey to when they completed the annual survey.
- ✓ **92% OF MEMBERS INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE TMF INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they feel their participation with TMF has a positive impact on their community compared to 71% of members who participated in only one type of initiative.

### MEANING: SATISFACTORY MEANING IN LIFE

- ▶ **92% OF VETERANS AND FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they had satisfactory **MEANING IN THEIR LIFE**, compared to 75% of veterans and families of the fallen who participated in only one type of initiative.
- ▶ **87% OF CIVILIANS INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they had satisfactory **MEANING IN THEIR LIFE**, compared to 80% of civilians who participated in only one initiative.

### RELATIONSHIPS: COMMUNITY BELONGING

- ▶ **84% OF VETERANS AND FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they **FEEL A SENSE OF BELONGING IN THEIR COMMUNITY**, compared to 71% of veterans and survivors who participated in only one initiative.
- ▶ **89% OF CIVILIANS INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they **FEEL A SENSE OF BELONGING IN THEIR COMMUNITY**, compared to 76% of civilians who participated in only one initiative.

### ENGAGEMENT: ENERGIZED IN ACTIVITIES

- ▶ **97% OF VETERANS AND FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they **FEEL ENERGIZED** in most activities, compared to 84% of veterans and survivors who participated in only one initiative.
- ▶ **97% OF CIVILIANS INVOLVED IN 3 OR MORE INITIATIVES** agreed or strongly agreed that they **FEEL ENERGIZED** in most activities, compared to 90% of civilians who participated in only one initiative.

# CHARACTER DOES MATTER (CDM) PROGRAM PILOT STUDY

“Working with youth (CDM Leadership Courses); I felt like I was making a difference.”

—CDM mentor

“Learning about ethical decision making and the impacts our decisions have on others impacted me.”

—CDM youth

In the fall of 2018, the IVMF began a pilot study to assess the effect of TMF's CDM program on school-aged young adults. In the CDM program, veterans and families of the fallen serve as mentors to youth, delivering a character-development curriculum that is rooted in helping youth identify their personal character strengths in order to serve others and the community at large. The study looked at questions beyond the immediate character and leadership education to assess for improvements in areas of scholastic competence, education expectation, social acceptance, attitudes toward risk, pro-social orientation, and caring.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

### OVERALL FINDING: CDM HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUNG ADULTS

- ▶ Preliminary results show that young adults who participate in the CDM program had a significant increase in caring, educational expectations, and pro-social attitudes.
- ▶ Preliminary findings indicate that CDM school liaisons feel students are learning valuable lessons in character and leadership that they might otherwise never be exposed to. It is observed that students are given the confidence to do the right thing and share their insights with peers, which may lead improved character development for non-participating students.



<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



## NEXT STEPS

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|---|---|
| ✓ Continuously revise the annual survey to reflect insight gained from each survey dissemination. | ✓ Expand the study of school-aged young adults to include more CDM schools to gain a comprehensive picture of program structure and the impact CDM has on school-aged young adults. |
| ✓ Expand assessment efforts to include TMF administrative data to compliment survey efforts.      | ✓ Explore additional participant and programmatic factors related to thriving and well-being.   |