

# Youth Resiliency Summary Report Key Findings

Principal Report

**Reflect - Explore - Build - Empower**

Prepared for:

## Ambassadors of Compassion

August 28, 2015



**Resiliency  
Initiatives**

by MERITCORE, Inc

PHONE:  
866-948-7706

EMAIL:  
info@resil.ca

[StrengthsBasedEducation.com](http://StrengthsBasedEducation.com)



## Key Findings:

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the survey clearly demonstrate that the Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC) Program effectively supports the development of the essential strengths related to positive resilience. The youth surveyed demonstrated an enhanced understanding and ability to draw upon their resilience, character competencies, and leadership knowledge/skills in constructive ways.

The aggregated resiliency reports revealed the following trends:

- 1) The students initially revealed varying degrees of resiliency with the largest percentage falling into the category of being Optimally Resilient (46.4%) and Resilient (25.3%) with only 25.3% presenting as Vulnerable and 3% as being Impoverished Resilient.
  - In light of this diversity, the **AOC program was able to positively engage both vulnerable and resilient students at an individualized and larger group level.**
- 2) The AOC Program demonstrated significant enhancement of numerous developmental strengths for the Impoverished and the Vulnerable groups while maintaining and solidifying developmental strengths in the Resilient and Optimally Resilient students.
  - The ability to engage and develop rapport with Impoverished and Vulnerable students is extremely significant as these youth tend to reflect minimal relationship skills and social connectedness. They are often the challenging group many programs and school settings struggle to engage.
  - The results also indicate that the AOC Program builds upon and solidifies the resilient capacity of its participants.
- 3) Overall, the aggregated results clearly indicate that the AOC Program has a two-fold role and opportunity:
  - It can have an **intervention effect** of capacity building with those students who present as vulnerable and at-risk.
  - The AOC program also promotes an effective **preventative influence** that builds and solidifies the resilient capacity of participants. Nurturing sustainable resiliency is a dynamic and ongoing process that all youth need to be engaged in.

#### **1. To what degree and in which ways did the students develop a greater understanding of their potential strengths and character-leadership capacities by their participation in the AOC Program?**

Based upon the pre-post responses, the student participants demonstrated an enhanced understanding of and confidence in their resiliency/strengths and character competencies with the resulting implications for effective leadership at a personal, academic, and community citizenship level.

For the students, their responses on the resiliency questionnaire played an important role in determining the potential of being positively impacted by the AOC Program.

- The students who presented with a resilient or optimally resilient profile prior to the program demonstrated an ability to maintain or to potentially stretch forward their ability to navigate and negotiate new challenges and opportunities in successful ways.
- Students who present as impoverished or vulnerable in their resilience often need longer and unconditional relational support to effectively explore and build up the skill sets, protective factors, and social experiences required for navigating life's challenges. The challenged youth appear to have responded positively to the AOC Program based upon being engaged in ways that created acceptance, valuing who they are, and building a trust relationship before directing.
- In a very positive way, ***the AOC Program evidenced the ability to engage 87% of impoverished youth towards positive outcomes.***

On the evaluation questionnaires, the students reported the following strengths and character competencies as having been positively enhanced by their participation in the AOC Program:

- ***Stronger connectedness to family*** in areas of communication, support, and seeing parents as role models - 83% said that they have better relationships and ways of communicating with parents or guardian.
- ***Stronger self-esteem and a self-belief in their potential and ability to forgive*** themselves and others as part of their own journey forward - 92% said they feel good about who they are and what they have to offer to others.
- ***Better understanding of what a positive support relationship is and why relationships are important***, including the ability to choose positive peer friendships - 87% said they are better at choosing friends that they can trust who encourage them to make positive choices.
- ***Enhanced awareness and understanding of the importance of education and the need to engage in learning for future success***, employment, and positive community citizenship - 96% said they have a better understanding of why a good education will be important for them to be successful in life.
- ***More positive relationships with school staff and community members*** to act as guides and positive supports in their journey - 93% said they know how to and want to develop respectful relationships with teachers and other important adults.
- ***The ability to respect different ideas and value what is important to others*** - 95% said they know it is important to respect others and act in ways that they will feel valued.
- ***Increased awareness of positive challenges*** and what are real risks that will rob them of their goals and aspirations in life - 91% feel confident they can manage challenging situations or problems.

- **Enhanced understanding of leadership traits**, especially in the areas of problem solving, planning, capacity to care, moral and ethical values, self-esteem, and confidence in decision-making. For example 94% feel they have a better ability to plan and set realistic goals; 97% believe they will be achieving some of their goals within 5 years from now; 94% say they now make choices based on what is right, not on what others tell them.

Based upon the responses gathered from the qualitative questions, the students reported positive enhancements in the following areas:

- They had an enhanced ability to connect with others in strengths-based ways, resulting in an increased network of positive relationships and supports.
- They increased their confidence in understanding and applying positive social skills and character-leadership traits.
- They experienced what success means by working collaboratively with other peers on a project.
- They learned what it means to feel respected and valued and can now value others.
- They developed a clearer understanding and ability to draw upon their unique strengths in a way that promotes learning and success and decreases engagement in risk oriented coping when faced with challenges.
- They developed greater confidence in their own capacity for good ideas, ability to solve problems, reasoning for taking smart-risks in positive and respectful ways, thinking outside the box, courage to take personal responsibility, and engaging the right relationships for the right reasons.
- They developed a greater understanding of how to create and engage in situations that only add to their story, making risk less of an option.

## **2. What are the specific strength-based strategies and interventions that supported the effectiveness of the AOC Program, what worked, what may need to be modified and what needs to be dropped?**

In general, the students considered their involvement in the program to be the start of a life-changing experience – one that was a meaningful and purposeful invitation to see their potential.

The students indicated the following insights and observations:

- They felt that the program coaches engaged them in a very accepting and non-judgmental manner.
- They were intrigued with and excited about the fact that other adults would actually be interested in getting to know students with challenging life stories.
- They liked the idea that the coach was there to accept them for who they really are and learn about their real life story as a way to help understand “what might be” and to normalize the challenges they might be experiencing.

- They liked the process of focusing on strengths or what positive quality they could build upon as a starting point. This created a stronger openness to engage with the other students in the program and the coach.
- They felt the program kept its promises and provided the support needed to take the risks to connect with the session facilitator and volunteer coaches.

## Recommendations

Although it is customary in program evaluation to offer recommendations for improving the program based upon the findings of the evaluation, ***this evaluation found that the objectives of the AOC Program were not only met, but evidenced results that were unexpected.*** As a result, the AOC Program should be supported. It is highly likely that with further evaluation, based upon a more formal research criteria and greater numbers of participants, it would be considered an innovative and effective youth leadership and coaching model that other communities and organizations will look to as part of their desire for best practice.

Some considerations:

- 1) Some thought needs to be given to how the program can be streamlined and supported so that as the AOC Program is scaled in different contexts and communities, it will produce similar outcomes. ***This will require a more formalized training process so that it can be easily adapted into school systems and community-based programs.***
- 2) The current evaluation was not a pure research initiative with a control group or risk/ prosocial factors incorporated into the project design. ***In order to move towards publication in a peer review journal, future studies should build upon these initial positive results and learning*** with a more rigorous approach and design that follows research and ethics protocol through an established academic institution.
- 3) The AOC Program starts a process that supports and guides the youth towards realizing their potential. Since the program invites a relational connection, ***processes will need to be developed that support a transfer of the coaching relationship to other community connections the youth participant might have.*** If this is not considered, the potential of feeling abandoned or losing potential benefits from participating in the program could be realized by the youth.
- 4) Many of the AOC Program processes and reasoning are unique and innovative. The current evaluation revealed that it has been highly successful at a number of levels and outlined the advantages it has as being a complement to school success, by creating future leaders and positive community citizens. The AOC Program is a unique opportunity for corporations and others to become involved in enhancing community capacity. It also creates a way to constructively influence a future generation of potential community leaders, citizens, and workers. ***This is possibly a new model for community investment and expression for corporate citizenship.***

As part of next steps, the results provide a conceptual map for how the AOC Program along with school staff members and community agencies, could collaborate to establish a resilient culture that supports students to experience their potential. Building the social capacity of students leads to the desired results of academic success, constructive citizenship, and personal development. The AOC Program provides a complement to that goal by effectively enhancing and solidifying the resiliency and protective factors that research clearly identifies as essential for youth to successfully navigate the critical developmental milestones towards becoming healthy adults.