

Summary of TWP findings
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Background (Why The Woods Project is Important)

Students in high-poverty, inner city schools tend to have significantly worse outcomes than their same age peers in more affluent schools, including: increased involvement with the juvenile justice system, more use of drugs and alcohol, higher rates of teenage pregnancy, and worse academic performance. These social adjustment problems lead to lower educational attainment and worse employment outcomes, with substantial costs to individuals and society.

A notable difference between the low-income, inner-city youth and others is access to developmental assets or positive experiences and qualities that influence young people's development helping them become caring, responsible and productive adults. Some critically important developmental assets are grit and perseverance, self-confidence, social skills, ability to work with teams, being open to new experience, being able to face fears, and having appreciation for one's situation. Decades of research published in high quality scientific journals shows that these developmental assets are associated with significantly improved life outcomes, such as higher high-school graduation rates and finding gainful employment. Properly structured external supports can bolster developmental assets. Programs that show increases in multiple developmental assets are seen as superior to programs that boost only one developmental asset.

The Woods Project and Developmental Assets.

Since its inception, The Woods Project's structured activities, including school-based clubs, weekend camping trips, and a capstone two-week long wilderness experience have built multiple developmental assets in inner city youth. Additionally, The Woods Project also provides several external supports to its participants. One of these is "bridging" external support that exposes youth to role models who provide tangible and intangible social support that helps to encourage a transition to a higher SES, such as by applying to college. Bridging support is further bolstered by TWP scholarships. Another critical TWP input is "bonding" social support, in which participants learn to work together in challenging situations to develop or improve their ability to communicate and work in teams.

Multiple years of research have shown that inner city youth who participate in The Woods Project show statistically significant improvements in key developmental assets. Further, robust results showing significant change in multiple developmental assets have been replicated in the past two years. To provide some details: A total of 160 youth went on TWP trips in 2018, with 31 participating in a special Junior Leader Program (JLP) to the Apostle Islands. In 2019, a total of 168 youth went on TWP trips, with 30 in the JLP trip to the Apostle

Islands. In pre- and post-trip surveys completed by youth in the past two summers, there were statistically significant improvements in the all seven developmental assets measured by TWP: confidence, perseverance, social skills, teamwork, facing fears, openness to experience, and appreciation. These self-reported changes are statistically reliable and correlate with group leader reported changes. Importantly, calculating the effect size of change (Cohen's *d*) the amount of change in 6 of the 7 variables for both years was higher than what is usually achieved by a whole academic year of social emotional instruction, which is .40 (see Figures 1 and 2).

Positive outcomes at the individual level

The data presented in Figures 1 and 2 is group means that show general trends. We also conducted analysis at the individual level, determining the percentage of youth who participated in summer trips that had positive outcomes.

Consistent with previous years, The Woods Project collected data from summer trip participants immediately before and after trips. As of Summer 2019, Qualtrics on-line survey has been used to collect data. This initially resulted in some technical challenges with linking surveys, which has since been corrected. In Summer 2019, a total of 167 youth completed TWP trips, and data was collected from 145. At the time of this report, the evaluators had matched 94 of the immediate pre- and post-trip self-reports of changes in cognitive emotional functioning and character strengths. Further data analysis, will include follow-up results into the fall and spring with a larger sample. Although not all data were included in the results reported below, the evaluators believe the results are based on a representative sample as the issues with linking pre-to post-scores were due to random errors in the data collection process run by the evaluators.

Positive outcomes are defined as participants who begin the program at a good level prior to their participation and maintained that good level, or participants who begin the program at a low level and increasing to a better level. Measuring positive outcomes are preferred to measuring change since, by simply measuring change participants who stay at a positive level are not distinguished from participants who stay at a negative level.

Cognitive emotional functioning was measured using the internationally validated Pemberton Happiness Scale. According to this well-regarded measure of well-being, the current pre-to-post results show that 78.3% of the TWP summer 2019 trip participants showed a positive outcome on cognitive emotional functioning.

Over the past few years, TWP has worked with evaluators to also create measures for character traits targeted by TWP. Independent evaluations of the measures of seven traits have found these self-reports are technically adequate with good reliability and discriminant validity. In the summer of 2019, pre-to post- trip positive outcomes specific to character strengths were: 67% for facing fears, 67.3% for social skills, 69.1% for appreciation, 69.1% for self-confidence, 72.3% for openness to experience, 72.3% for perseverance, and 74.2% in teamwork. Taken together,

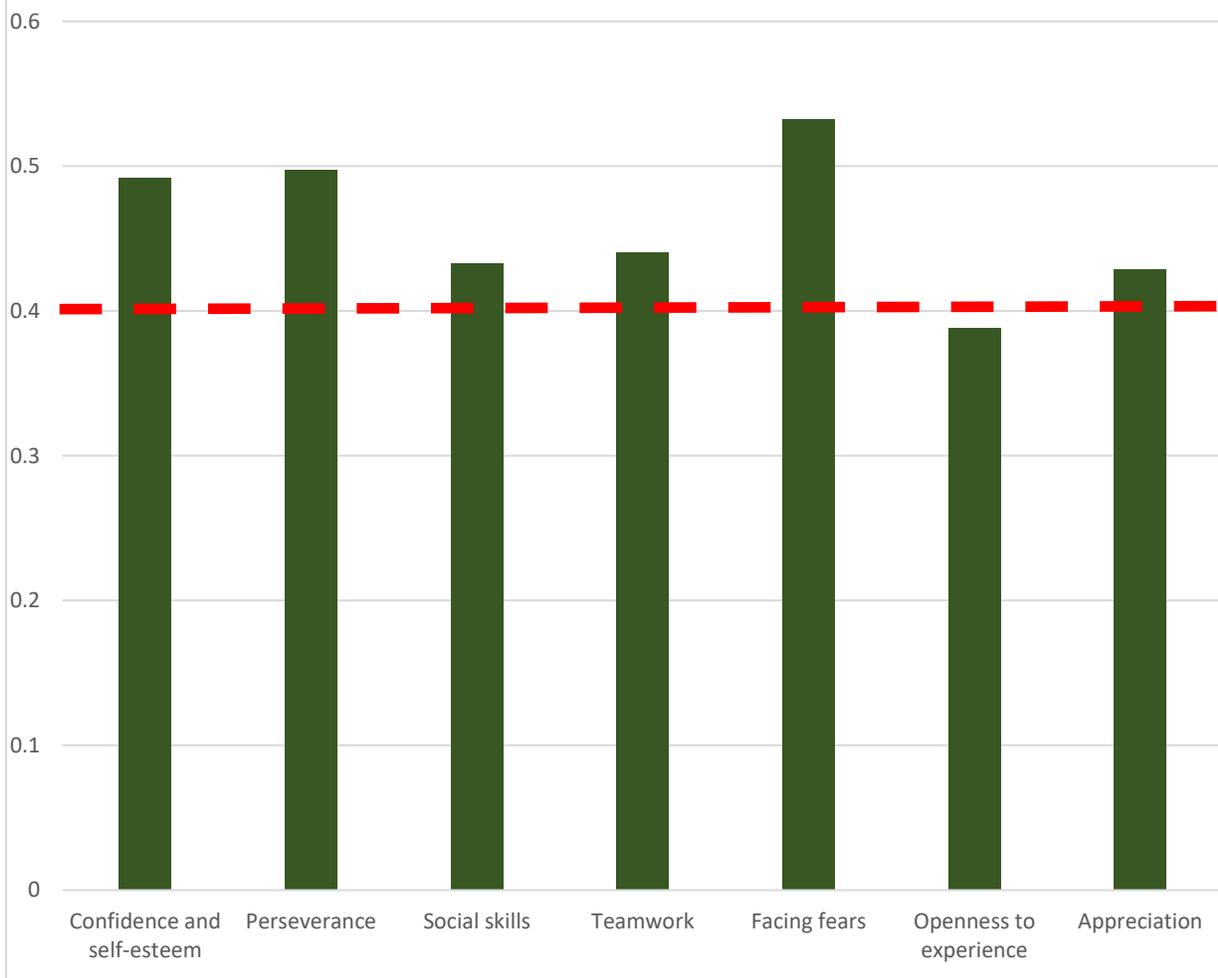
the average rate of positive outcomes for all seven character traits was 70.2%. As presented in Figure 2, the mean amount of change in six of the seven character traits was statistically significant at $p < .05$, with effect sizes greater than .4, which exceeds the average effect size seen in most year-long educational interventions.

Outcomes for TWP Alumni

Changes in the developmental assets of TWP participants could account for the better outcomes in TWP alumni. This year TWP started a follow-up study of trip alumni, and the preliminary results are very promising, based on an initial sample of 44 alumni. Highlights of surveys completed by these alumni include:

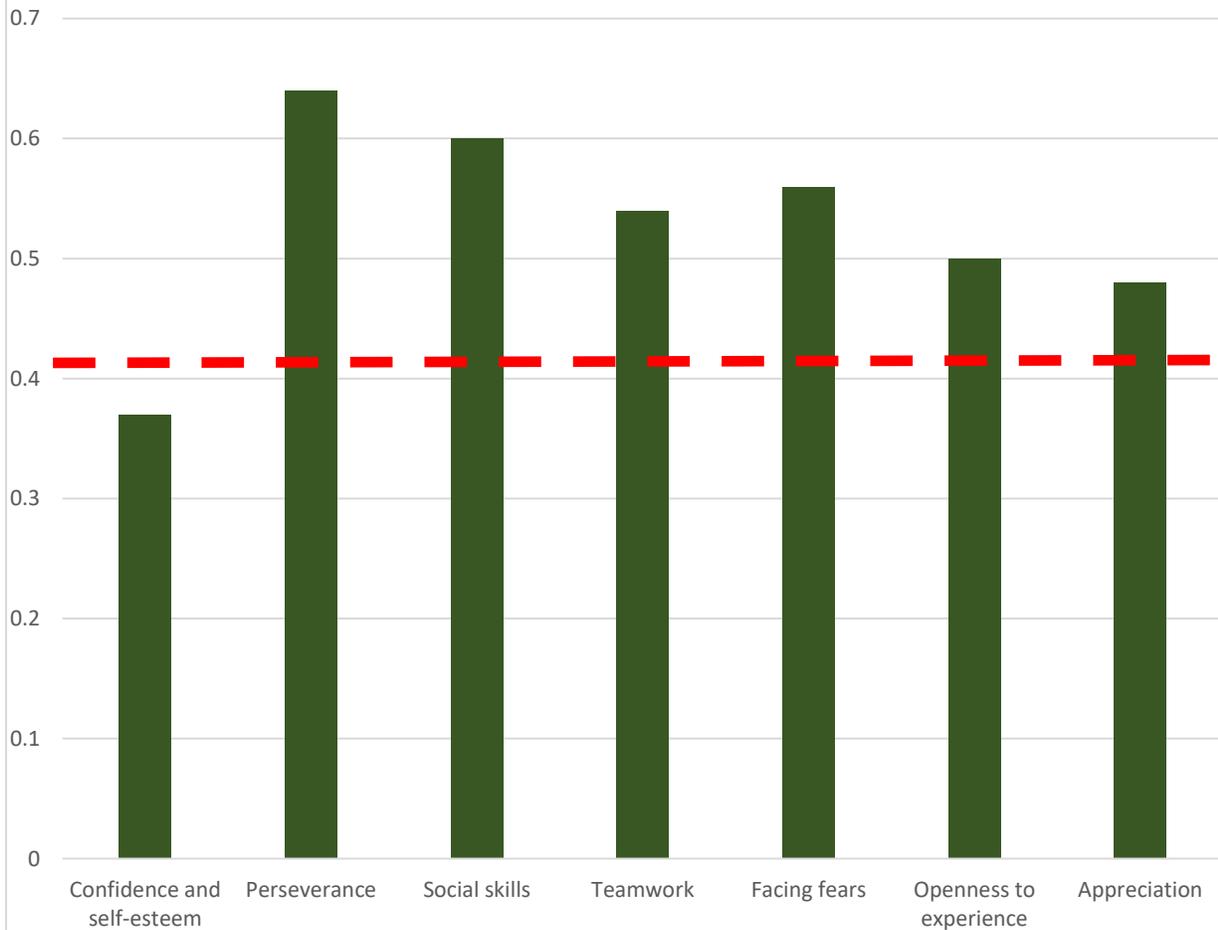
- All six alumni who have not graduated high school yet were still in school (100%). Of note, in Houston, the high school dropout rate for 9th grade is 14% and overall dropout rate is about 25% for HISD.
- Of the 38 who have graduated high school, 23 (60.5%) are enrolled in post-secondary education. In Texas, less than 50% of African American or Latino students enroll in post-secondary education shortly after high school graduation.
- Of the 38 trip alumni who graduated high school, 35 (92.1%) were in school, working, or doing some "other" unspecified, positive activity.
- Taken together, with the exception of one alumnus out of 44, all are doing better than expected for their demographic group (97.7%) in terms of education and employment.

Amount of Change in Developmental Assets for the 2018 The Woods Project Cohort



- The dashed red line shows the average effect size for one year of educational intervention (Cohen's d of .40)
- Six out of seven developmental assets increased by more than .40 as a result of participation in The Woods Project two-week summer wilderness trip. All of these changes were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

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