



CAMP HOPE AS A PATHWAY OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



A PRE-TEST, POST-TEST EVALUATION OF HOPE
AND YOUTH CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

2021 CAMP HOPE RESULTS

THE CENTER FOR FAMILY JUSTICE

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CENTER FOR FAMILY JUSTICE DATA EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the evaluation results for the 2021 Camp HOPE America impact on children's Hope, Resilience, and Character Development. Data for this evaluation is based upon Camp HOPE programs from Center for Family Justice, Bridgeport, CT.

– In order to assess changes in hope, resilience, and character development, a matched pre-camp, post-camp, and follow-up assessment design was used.

– A total of **43** campers provided responses to the self-report survey. **43** provided complete data at the pre-camp assessment, **43** provided complete data on the final day of camp assessment, **41** provided complete data at the 30-day follow-up assessment, and **41** sets of surveys were matched for comparison.

– The average age of campers was **12.37 years (SD = 2.44)**. Regarding gender, **41.9%** marked **male**, and **55.8%** marked **female**, and **2.3%** marked **other**.

– Matched observational comparisons were made for **Hope** and **Character Development** in the areas of Zest, Grit, Optimism, Self-Control, Gratitude, Curiosity, and Social Intelligence.

– Mean ACE score **5.68**.

CAMPER SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

– Increases in Hope were **statistically significant**.

CAMP COUNSELOR OBSERVATION

– Increases in child **positive character** behaviors were **statistically significant** in the following areas:

Ability to create pathways and dedicate energy toward goals (**Hope**).

Excitement and energy toward goals (**Zest**).

Perseverance for goals (**Grit**).

Capacity to control thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when in conflict (**Self-Control**).

Positive future expectation (**Optimism**).

Appreciation for the kindness received by others (**Gratitude**).

Awareness of the feelings and motivations of others (**Social Intelligence**).

Desire to learn and seek out new information (**Curiosity**).



INTRODUCTION

CHILD EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Exposure to domestic violence affects many individuals in the United States every year. As many as ten million children and adolescents in the United States will bear witness to acts of domestic violence each year (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2019). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines domestic violence or intimate partner violence as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse” (Centers for Disease Control, 2018). Meta-analytic studies consistently find that children exposed to domestic violence are at a higher risk for emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties both in the short- and long-term (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003). Children exposed to domestic violence experience additional stresses associated with the trauma of repeated separations, child custody battles, and isolation from extended family supports. Children exposed to domestic violence are also at a significantly higher risk for abuse and neglect (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

While the research on children exposed to domestic violence is emerging, studies show these children are at an increased risk for anxiety and depression, loss of interest in school and friends, social isolation, increased physical and psychological aggression, bullying or being bullied, and a propensity to perpetuate the cycle of domestic violence (Carlson, 1990; Lichter & McClosky, 2004; Litrownik, Newton, & Hunter, 2003). Adolescents in particular who witness domestic violence are at an increased risk of drug or alcohol abuse, truancy, declining grades and oppositional or rebellious behavior (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2019). Given the prevalence of children exposed to domestic violence in the US and the negative consequences on their futures, an effective system-level intervention is needed to provide children the opportunity to develop positive coping mechanisms that will allow them to thrive in difficult environments. One such intervention, with the potential for system level influence, is Camp HOPE. Recently, Hellman and Gwinn (2017) published the first evaluation of Camp HOPE showing significant increases in Hope in a pre-test, post-test design among campers from several California Family Justice Centers and other multi-agency models.

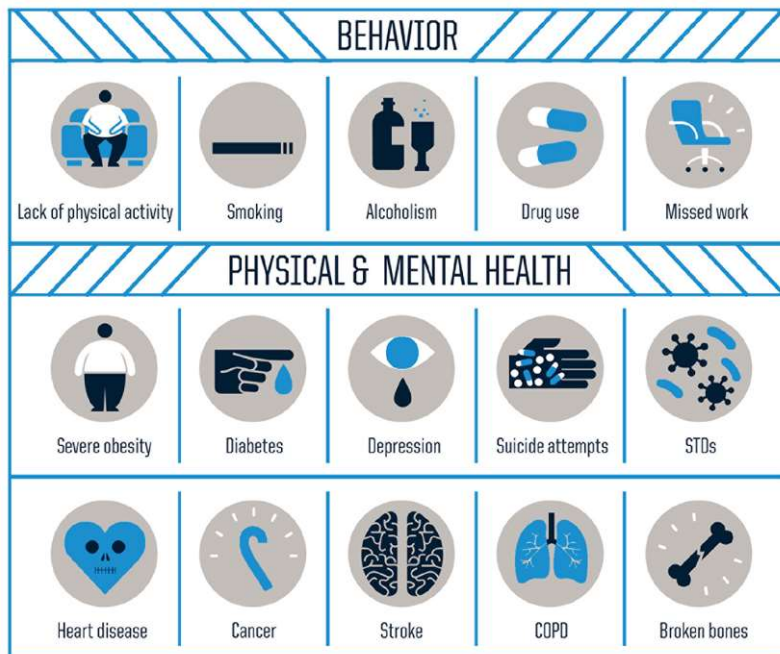


ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE STUDY

The negative consequences associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) across the lifespan are well documented. ACEs cause chronic toxic stress that leads to neurological and biological changes, including changes in brain architecture and function, effects on the immune and hormonal systems, and even alterations to the way DNA is read and transcribed (Harris, 2014). Left untreated, those who have experienced child maltreatment are more likely to experience poor mental health, engage in risky behaviors, and suffer physical diseases related to increased morbidity. Unmitigated ACEs have negative effects on education, employment, and economic outcomes into adulthood. Unmitigated ACEs are also associated with increased delinquency rates and criminal behaviors (Anda et al., 2007; Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes & Harrison, 2013; Currie & Wisdom, 2010; Dube et al., 2001a; Dube et al., 2001b; Gwinn, 2015; Hillis, Anda, Felitti & Marchbanks, 2001; Lanier, Kohl, Raghavan, & Auslander, 2015; Reavis, Looman, Franco, & Rojas, 2013; Wilimansion, Thompson, Anda, Dietz & Felitti, 2002).

Studies available through the Center for Disease Control (2016) report significant negative consequences with an ACE score of 4 or higher. For example, with an ACE of 4+:

- **3600%** more likely to become an injection drug (heroin) user (4600% at ACE of 6)
- **1200%** greater likelihood of attempting suicide as an adult (2900% at ACE of 6)
- **1200%** more likely to be a SA victim
- **1000%** more likely to inject street drugs
- **700%** more likely to become an alcoholic
- **600%** more likely to have sex before age 15
- **300%** more likely to contract HIV
- **300%** more likely to become a domestic violence victim (woman); 150% (men)
- **300%** greater likelihood of struggling with chronic depression
- **240%** greater risk of hepatitis
- **240%** higher risk of an STD
- **200%** more likely to become smokers
- **51%** of those with ACE Score of 4 will have behavioral problems in school



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



CAMP HOPE AMERICA

Camp HOPE America is the first local, state, and national camping and mentoring initiative in the United States to focus on children exposed to domestic violence. The vision for Camp HOPE America is to break the generational cycle of family violence by offering healing and hope to children who have witnessed family violence. Camp HOPE America is a program of [Alliance for HOPE International](#), the umbrella organization for all Family Justice Centers and similar multi-agency models serving victims of domestic violence and their children throughout the United States.

The Camp HOPE America Program is a strengths and character-based summer camp and mentoring model with a six-day, overnight program, and follow-up activities during the school year. The program focuses on three key elements: 1) "Challenge by Choice" activities, 2) affirmation and praise for developing observed character traits, and 3) themed, small group discussion and activities focused on helping children set goals and then pursue those goals. Challenge by Choice refers to challenging children to set daily achievement goals by

pursuing activities with perceived danger or risk (e.g., canoeing, zip line) while allowing them to opt out of those activities if the challenge creates unmanageable stress or fear. Campers are positively encouraged to engage in the personal challenges presented, however no camper is coerced, negatively pressured or unconstructively persuaded to take part in any activities. Campers are encouraged to support each other in their personal Challenge by Choice whether they determine to undertake a particular activity or not. All activities are designed to promote creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, teamwork and mutual support, reasoning, self-esteem, competency, self-management, group trust, organization, and goal setting. Even if campers do not participate in challenging activities, they are expected to participate in other daily camp activities and to follow all safety and group protocols. For safety reasons, campers are not allowed to leave the group setting or be alone at any time (the exception includes toileting or showering).

Each Camp HOPE America Affiliate across the U.S. collaborates with a partner camp.



The trained camp staff members, from a traditional summer camp not focused on children exposed to family violence, supervised all recreational activities. Camp HOPE America Affiliate staff members and volunteers managed core program activities and other therapeutic components. The individualized child centered approach used utilizes a 1:3 ratio. There are two counselors per each 6-person HOPE Circle, cabin group. Each group is assigned a partner Camp counselor and a Hope counselor. Throughout the week, each HOPE Circle participated in the various camp activities together and built relationships within the smaller group instead of simply participating in all activities in a large group. Using a trauma-informed camper/counselor approach, Camp HOPE focuses on providing affirmation and encouragement including nightly campfires where campers received Character Trait Awards each day from their peers or college-aged counselors. Camp HOPE program activities are site specific but have included rafting, tubing, high and low ropes challenge courses (age specific), horseback riding, arts and crafts, kayaking and canoeing, recreational hiking and field games, skits and camp songs, nightly campfires, journaling, KBAR (kick back and relax) time in the cabins/tents each day with counselors and campers, camp fire group discussions each night (where children are asked the question "Where did you see hope today?"), three family-style meals each day (eating with their own cabin group), and core program activities with the intention of community building. Each day at Camp HOPE, there is a positive statement for the day, also known as, "Truth Statements." California used a new curriculum while national partners used the previous summer's curriculum.

Some of the statements included: "My life has purpose," "Painting a new picture," "My voice has power," and "Art is healing." By having a positive statement for each day, children had the opportunity to internalize their own uniqueness, personal progress, need for others, future-oriented focus, and perseverance. Children do participate in "free play" at Camp HOPE but are never without an adult mentor or college-aged counselor. All electronics including cell phones, laptops, and other devices were collected and turned off when children arrived at camp. Electronic items were then returned after the conclusion of the camp.

As Camp Hope America approached the summer of 2021, camp is exactly what all young people needed. Camp Hope America were more prepared with necessary Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) and understood they could operate successfully with necessary precautions. Camp Hope America was able to lean on national partners at the [American Camp Association](#), [Advisory Board Members](#), and [Alliance for Camp Health](#) Director, Tracey Gaslin, and the [global scientific community](#) for guidance. With all the knowledge, experience gained from the experiences from the summer of 2020, and evolving new tools (such as affordable testing) designed to keep campers and staff as safe and healthy as possible, Affiliates were able to operate 29 Overnight Camp Sessions and 9 Hybrid Virtual Day camps with a total of 1,495 participants benefiting from programming, care, and curriculum. With the utilization of Verizon's funding, Camp HOPE America staff was onsite to provide guidance, support, and technical assistance for 17 of the 29 in-person sessions in 11 different states.



HOPE THEORY

Hope refers to the positive expectation children have toward the attainment of a future oriented goal. Research has emerged indicating Hope as a positive influence on overall health and wellbeing (cf. Hellman & Gwinn, 2017). Snyder (2000) described hope as a cognitive-based motivational theory in which children learn to create strategies as a means to attain their desired goals. Hope theory has two fundamental cognitive processes termed "pathways" and "agency." Pathway thought processes are the mental strategies or road maps toward goal attainment. In this process, children consider various pathways to their goals. Once viable pathways are formed, the hopeful child is able to conceive of potential barriers and develop strategies to overcome the barriers or choose an alternative pathway. Agency thinking refers to the willpower or mental energy the child can direct and sustain toward their goal pursuits. Hopeful children are able to exert mental energy to their pathways and persevere by self-regulating their thoughts, emotions and behaviors toward their desirable goal. Encouraging hope in children has positive physical, academic, and social benefits (Sheehan & Rall, 2011).

The role of hope in a child's capacity to flourish is well established. Hopeful thinking among children is positively associated with perceived competence and self-worth (Kwon, 2000) as well as lower rates of depression and anxiety (Ong, Edwards, & Bergeman, 2006). Children with higher hope are more optimistic about the future, have stronger problem-solving skills, and develop more life goals. Hopeful children are less likely to have behavior problems or experience psychological distress. These children also report better interpersonal relationships and higher school achievement success in the areas of attendance, grades, graduation rates, and college going rates (Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). Moreover, hope has been shown to serve as a resilience factor when facing stressful life events among children (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006). Finally, hope was shown to be positively associated with emotional well-being in a six-year longitudinal study investigating hope and positive youth development (Ciarrochi, Parker, Kashdan, Heaven & Barkus, 2015).



METHODS

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

A total of 43 surveys were collected from youth participants of Camp HOPE programs in The Center for Family Justice, Bridgeport, CT. A pre-camp/post-camp/30-day follow-up survey design was utilized. Children received the pre-test survey several days prior to camp. Post-test surveys were collected the last morning before departing from the camp and follow-up surveys were collected approximately 30 days after camp had ended. The Center for Family Justice, Bridgeport, CT was responsible for recruiting, selecting, consenting children and guardians, and data collection.

A total of 43 campers provided responses to the self-report survey. Table 1 shows the number of surveys for pre-camp, post-camp, and follow-up along with the total matched comparisons.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Specific demographic variables that were collected included age and gender. The average age of the respondent was 12.37 years (SD = 2.44). Regarding gender, 41.9% marked male, and 55.80% marked female, 2.3% marked other.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF CAMPER SURVEYS

Site	Number
PRE-CAMP	43
POST-CAMP	43
FOLLOW-UP	41
MATCHED	41

MEASUREMENT: SELF-REPORT SURVEYS

CHILDREN'S HOPE

To assess hope, the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1997) was utilized to examine the extent to which children believe they can establish pathways to their goals as well as develop and maintain the willpower to follow these pathways. This measure is comprised of six self-report items with a six-point Likert-type response format (1 = none of the time; 6 = all of the time). Possible scores range from a low of six to a high of 36 with higher scores reflecting higher hope. Recent research demonstrated good psychometric properties across age, gender, race, and language translation (Hellman, et al., 2018).

CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

Following the Camp HOPE theme of believing in yourself, believing in others, and believing in your dreams, OU's Hope Research Center team developed six additional items to assess each child's self-reported resiliency. These individual items were also presented with a six-point Likert-type response (1 = none of the time; 6 = all of the time).



MEASUREMENT: COUNSELOR OBSERVATIONS

HOPE INDEX

Counselors were asked to complete the Children’s Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1997) for each camper in their respective cabin groups. Items were reworded to reflect this approach. For example, the item “I think I am doing pretty well” was reworded to “I think the camper is doing pretty well.” The questionnaires included the same six-item Children’s Hope Scale reworded to fit the observational intent.

CHILD CHARACTER STRENGTHS

In recent years, positive psychology has emerged as the scientific study of the emotions, traits, and relationships that promote the capacity to flourish and serve to buffer the negative effects of difficulties often experienced in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Furthermore, this work has identified 24 strengths of character that help young people thrive and are associated with socially desired outcomes such as academic achievement, attendance, athletic achievement, goal attainment, leadership, tolerance, kindness and pro-social

behaviors, to name a few (Park & Peterson, 2009). These 24 strengths have now been studied in over 190 countries with 2.6 million participants (viacharacter.org).

Interventions that target positive character development in youth now have a validated measurement application that can be used to promote well-being, especially among those who have experienced stress associated with trauma. The character strengths targeted for this assessment have been consistently shown to serve as a buffer to stress and serve as an important indicator of personal well-being (Park & Peterson, 2009).

Based on the positive psychology theory that character leads to the capacity to live a fulfilling and meaningful life, a character strength assessment was included. Following the Character Counts model, campers were assessed in the areas of zest, grit, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity. Counselors rated each camper in their group at the beginning of camp and the final morning of camp. Table 2 provides the character strength definition.

TABLE 2 CHARACTER STRENGTHS ASSESSED AT CAMP HOPE

Character Strength	Definition
ZEST	An approach to life filled with anticipation, excitement, and energy.
GRIT	Perseverance and passion for long-term goals.
OPTIMISM	The expectation that the future holds positive possibilities and likelihoods.
SELF-CONTROL	Capacity to regulate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when they conflict with interpersonal goals.
GRATITUDE	Appreciation for the benefits received from others and a desire to reciprocate with positive actions.
CURIOSITY	Search for information for its own sake. Exploring a wide range of information when solving problems.
SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE	Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people.

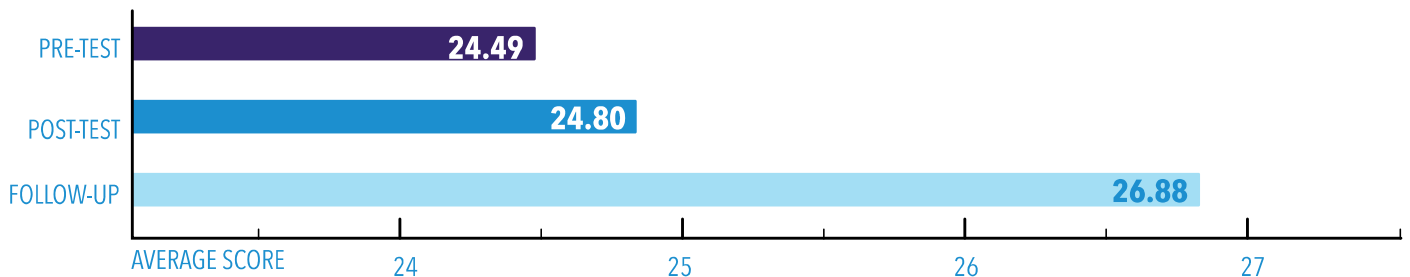


RESULTS

SELF-REPORT ASSESSMENTS

CHILDREN'S HOPE

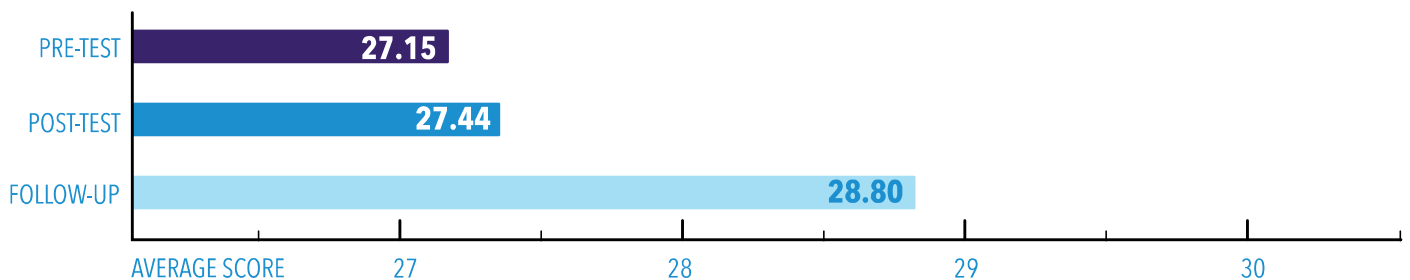
Hope reflects the individual's capacity to develop pathways and dedicate agency toward desirable goals.



This graph illustrates the change in scores for the Children's Hope Scale. As seen in the graph, hope scores increased from pre-test to post-test and again at the follow-up assessment. A repeated measures ANOVA showed that the increase in children's hope was statistically significant [$F(2, 80) = 5.661; p < .05$]. **This means that the individual's level of hope increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

CAMP HOPE RESILIENCY

Camp HOPE Resiliency is the combination of believing in self, believing in others, and believing in your dreams.



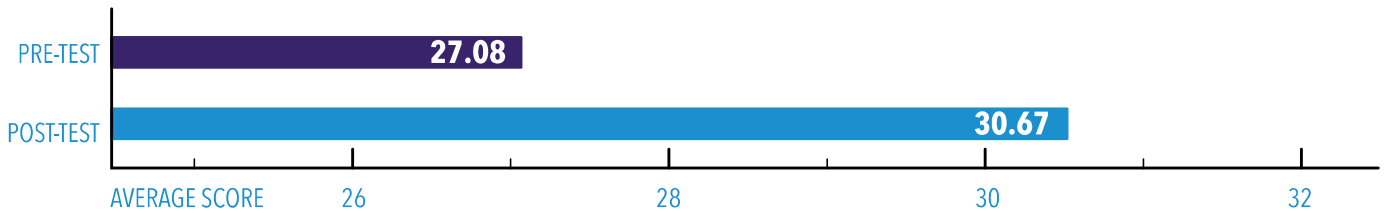
This graph illustrates the change in scores for the Camp HOPE Resiliency Scale. A repeated measures ANOVA was computed to examine the differences in pre-camp, post-camp, and follow-up test mean scores. The results of the analyses showed an increase from pre-test to post-test and an again from post-test to follow-up. This increase in children's resiliency [$F(2, 80) = 2.777; p > .05$] was statistically significant. **This means that the individual's resiliency increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**



CAMP COUNSELOR'S OBSERVATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER HOPE

Hope reflects the individual's capacity to develop pathways and dedicate agency toward desirable goals

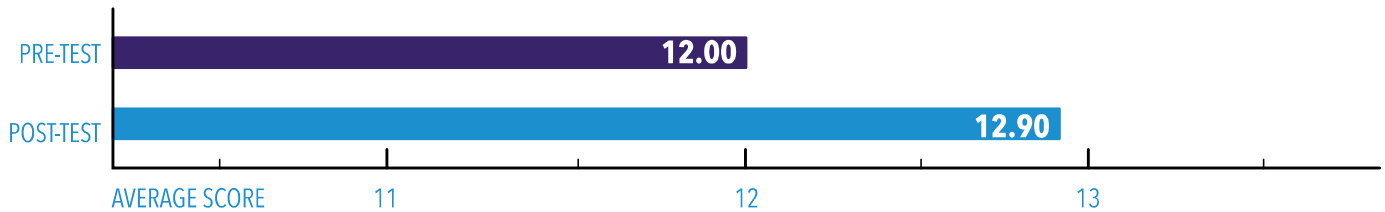


This graph demonstrates the change in observed hope by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total Hope scores [$t(39) = -4.613$; $p < .001$] significantly increased; this means that the individual's **levels of observable hope increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**



COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER ZEST

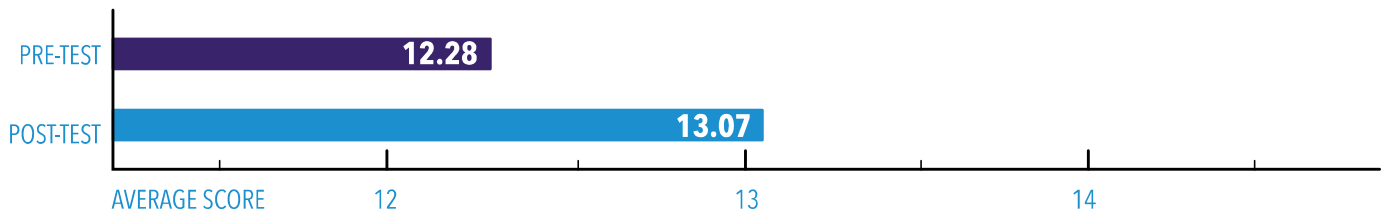
Zest is an approach to life filled with excitement and energy



This graph demonstrates the change in observed zest by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total Zest scores [$t(42) = -2.925$, $p < .05$] significantly increased; this means that the individual's **levels of observable zest increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

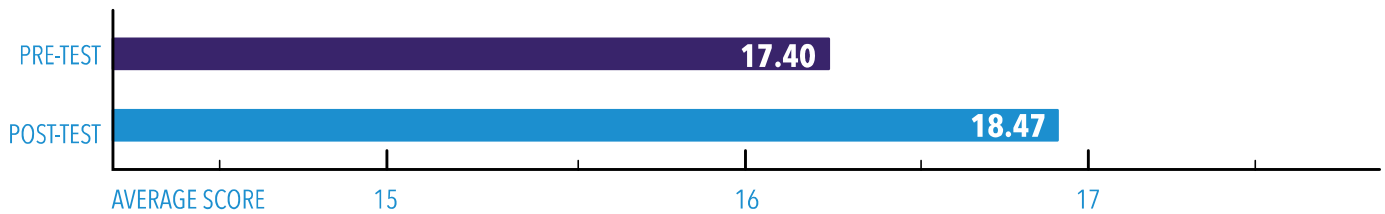


COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER GRIT
Grit reflects the perseverance and passion for long-term goals



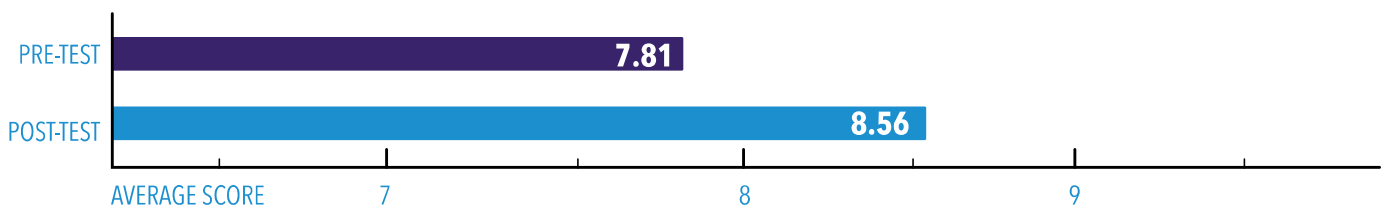
This graph demonstrates the change in observed grit by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total grit scores [$t(42) = -2.647, p < .05$] significantly increased; this means that the **individual's levels of observable grit increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER SELF-CONTROL
Self-Control refers to the capacity to regulate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when they conflict with interpersonal goals



This graph demonstrates the change in observed self-control by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total scores [$t(43) = -3.419, p < .001$] significantly increased; this means that the **individual's levels of observable self-control increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER OPTIMISM
Optimism is the expectation that the future holds positive possibilities and likelihood



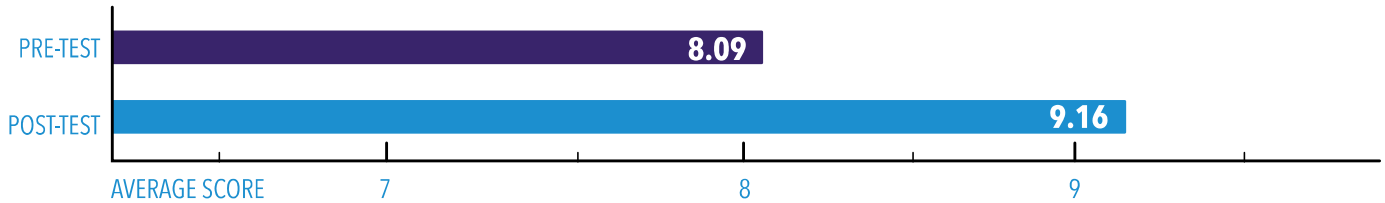
This graph demonstrates the change in observed optimism by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total scores [$t(43) = -3.419, p < .001$] significantly increased; this means that the **individual's levels of observable optimism increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**



RESULTS

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER GRATITUDE

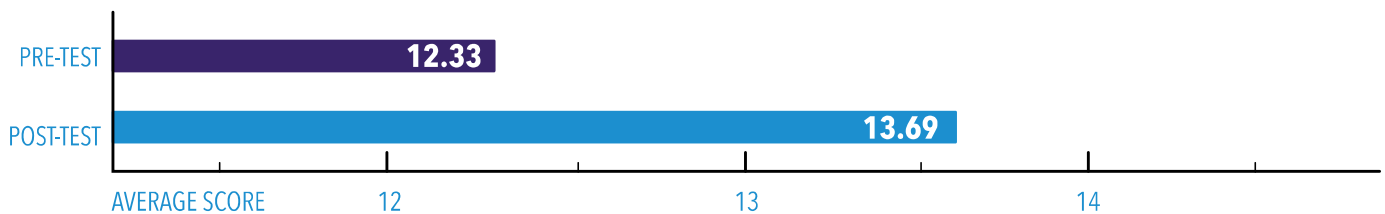
Gratitude is the appreciation for the benefits received from others with a desire to reciprocate with positive actions



This graph demonstrates the change in observed gratitude by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total gratitude scores [t (42)= -5.563, p<.001] significantly increased; this means that the **individual's levels of observable gratitude increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

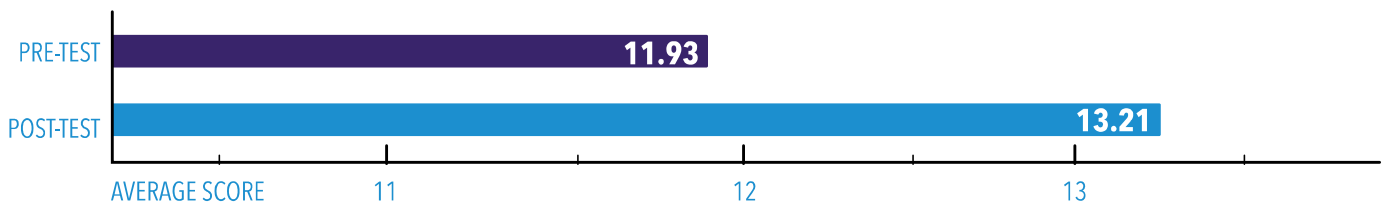
Social Intelligence refers to the awareness of the motives and feelings of other people



This graph demonstrates the change in observed social intelligence by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total scores [t (41)= -4.604, p<.001] significantly increased; this means that the **individual's levels of observable social intelligence increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**

COUNSELOR OBSERVATION OF CAMPER CURIOSITY

Curiosity is the search for information for its own sake
Exploring a wide range of information when solving problems



This graph demonstrates the change in observed curiosity by the camp counselors. A paired samples t-test was computed to examine the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores. Total curiosity scores [t (42) = -5.365, p<.001] significantly increased; this means that the individual's **levels of observable curiosity increased after participating in Camp HOPE.**



CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to present findings from the evaluation of Camp HOPE America 2021 from The Center for Family Justice, Bridgeport, CT. The primary outcome was to change the way children exposed to domestic violence believe in themselves, believe in others, believe in their dreams, and find hope for the future. The results of this study provide compelling evidence that Camp HOPE improves the hope of children in a manner that was self-reported by the children and teens and **observed by the camp counselors.**

Hope represents a positive psychological strength that promotes adaptive behaviors, healthy development, and both psychological and social well-being (Snyder, 1995). More specifically, Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib and Finch (2009) found that high levels of hope were related to life satisfaction across the lifespan. Higher hope is associated with better coping, health, and health related practices (Chang & DeSimone, 2001; Feldman & Sills, 2013; Kelsey et al., 2011). While hope has been shown to predict various indicators of well-being, it has also been shown to be malleable in intervention studies in the areas of mental health, coping with physical illness, and intimate partner violence (Berendes, Keefe, Somers, Kothadia, Porter, & Cheavens, 2010; Smith & Randall, 2007). Psychological strengths like hope tend to serve people best in difficult times. The capacity to formulate pathways and dedicate mental energy (agency) is the foundation to successful goal attainment.

The results of this evaluation support a compelling case for the power of Camp HOPE to change the lives of children exposed to domestic violence.



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THE HOPE RESEARCH CENTER

The mission of the University of Oklahoma is to provide the best possible educational experience for students through excellence in teaching, research, creative activity, and service to the state and society. The Hope Research Center focuses this mission by collaborating with nonprofit agencies to improve program services using sound scientific practice while simultaneously training students in the application of research methodologies.

The Hope Research Center is an interdisciplinary social science unit at the University of Oklahoma, Tulsa Schusterman Center. Collaborating with nonprofit human service organizations, faculty and graduate students lead research projects with a particular focus on sustainable well-being among vulnerable and otherwise at-risk individuals, families, and communities.

Guided by the principle that hope is the theory of change that explains the positive impact program services have on client outcomes, the Center is focused on three ideas.

1
HOPE BUFFERS ADVERSITY
AND STRESS (ESPECIALLY
IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMA)

2
INCREASING HOPE LEADS
TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES

3
HOPE CAN BE LEARNED
AND SUSTAINED THROUGH
TARGETED PROGRAM SERVICES

Faculty members who work in the center provide a full range of applied research activities including program evaluation and outcome assessment in support of nonprofit program service delivery. Participating faculty members are nationally recognized for their area of research and are expert methodologists with the capacity to match research protocols to the needs of the nonprofit community.



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