Giving Children the Tools to Bounce Back: A Program Evaluation of a Social-Emotional Learning Program at a Summer Camp for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Mayaugust P. Finkenberg
Stevenson University
USA

Abstract

Homelessness is a profoundly adverse experience for children and can set the stage for a lifetime of risk. One innovated non-profit agency sought to create a summer program for children living in homeless shelters and transitional housing that could mitigate risk and build protective factors to bolster their ability overcome adversity. A post-factor evaluation of the implementation of this social emotional program was conducted. This evaluation examined the context, resources, program fidelity and outcomes using existing data, focus group interviews and surveys. The findings of this study indicate that an SEL program can be implemented effectively in a summer camp serving children living in homeless shelters and transitional housing. Early product evaluation findings indicate growth and development in social-emotional learning.

Keywords: Social Development, Emotional Development, Summer Programs, Resilience (Psychology), Program Evaluation

1 Introduction

According to the National Center of Education Statistics there are over 1.2 million school children who are homeless in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Homelessness—and the stressful circumstances that lead to homelessness such as domestic violence, family disputes, mental illness, and substance abuse (Hsu & Caton, 2014; McQuistion, Gorroochurn)—often negatively impact children's development (Burchinal, Roberts, Hooper & Zeisef, 2000; Haskett, Armstrong, & Tisdale, 2016; Masten, et.al., 2012; Webster-Stratton, & Reid, 2008) and ultimately set the stage for negative life outcomes (Burchinal, Roberts, Hooper, Zeisef, 2000; Hamby, Grych & Banyard, 2018; Masten, 2014). While a correlation between risk and negative life outcomes is well documented (Burchinal, Roberts, Hooper, Zeisef, 2000; Haskett et al., 2016 Masten, 2014), recent research has focused on the phenomenon of resiliency, the ability to overcome and even excel despite adversity (Domintrovich et al., 2017; Hamby et al., 2018). This research has led to the development of programs and curricula that create a supportive environment and strengthen children's social competencies (Domintrovich et al., 2017; Landy, 2009; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008), helping to build the resiliency to overcome a life of risk. Comprehensive social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can help mitigate risk factors (Joseph, & Strain, 2003). However, there is limited research on SEL programs in summer camp settings serving homeless children. Because of this unique milieu, there was a need to see whether an SEL program could be implemented in a summer camp and whether it affected homeless children's resiliency. Specifically, this study sought to explore how an 8-week summer camp serving children living in homeless shelters could foster resiliency.

2 Background

2.1 Risk, Resiliency, and Protective Factors

Resiliency is the ability to adapt and overcome adversity (Benard, 1991). The study of resilience focuses on protective factors and positive trajectories (Benard, 1991; Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017; Luthar, Cicchett, & Becker; 2000; Masten, 2014; Smokowski, Mann, Reynolds, & Fraser, 2004; Tedeschi, & Kilmer, 2005) -- those unique qualities and attributes present in children, families, schools, and communities that enable the individual to persevere despite vulnerability. Resiliency is not just the absence of maladaptive behaviors; rather it is better described as the presence of positive outcomes or competences (Luthar, Cicchett, & Becker; Smokowski, Mann, Reynolds, & Fraser, 2004).

Risk factors can be conceptualized as stressors that act on an individual that correlate with vulnerability to negative developmental outcomes (Luthar, & Zigler, 1991; Werner, 1993) -- factors such as personal attributes, elements of the caretaking environment, parental mental illness, community violence, minority status, catastrophic life events, and demographics of the child and his or her family (Hamby et al., 2018; Luthar, Cicchett, & Becker, 1991; Werner, 1993). Luthar and Zigler (1991) describe risk factors that fall into three categories: child attributes, environmental factors, and life stressors. It is in the reciprocal nature of the three factors: child attributes, environmental factors, and life events that create an equation for risk (Evans. Li, & Whipple, 2013). Protective factors are qualities and attribute that buffer an individual from the negative effects of risks (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008). Many risk factors, in the reverse, are protective factor. For example, poverty is a risk factor but not being poor is a protective factor (Luthar, & Zigler, 1991). Werner, a pioneer in the study of resiliency, asserts that protective factors have a more profound impact on individuals' development and eventual outcomes than risk factors (Werner, 1993).

Emotional self-regulation is a distinguishing feature of highly resilient children (Buckner, Messacappa, & Beardslee, 2009). Buckner and colleagues' (2009) study of high-poverty youth establishes the positive correlation between children's emotional self-regulation and social competence, academic achievement, grades, and lower incidents of problem behaviors and mental health issues. Children with greater emotional regulation have better social skills and relationships with peers and teachers (Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007). These are malleable protective factors that can be strengthened and are, therefore, a focus of SEL programming (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

An individual's social environment is another important protective factor. A school or classroom provides a protective, resiliency building environment when it creates a sense of belonging, builds positive relationships between the staff and students, provides students with opportunities for meaningful participation, and teaches behavioral expectations (Benard, 1991; Brehm & Doll, 2009; Landy, 2009). Brehm and Doll (2009) describe resilient classrooms are those based on caring relationships between the teacher and the student. In contrast, Phillips and colleagues (1994) found childcare staff in high poverty communities used harsh, detached, and insensitive teaching techniques. Children who are already at high risk are again disadvantaged when they enter childcare due to the lack of a caring and supportive environment.

2.2 Social-Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning involves growth and development in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains (CASEL 2018; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Payton et al, 2008). CASEL identifies five core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making skills. Students who master these five core competencies are well positioned for success in school and in life because of their ability to regulate their emotions, set realistic, achievable goals, be empathetic, participate in positive interpersonal relationships, and make responsible decisions (Payton, et al., 2008).

Social emotional learning programs help children manage their emotions in the interest of developing caring interpersonal relationships, good, responsible decision-making skills, and to be able to handle difficult situations (Domintrovich et al., 2017). Simply put, SEL programs seek to ameliorate risk factors and strengthen the protective factors for children Domitrovich et al., 2017)

2.3 Description of the Program

The SEL program being studied was part of an eight-week summer learning program operated as a day camp in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The camp served approximately 190 children living in 16 homeless shelters and transitional housing centers in around the city and was operated by a well-established non-profit organization with over 145 years of service in the region.

Program Goals and Objectives. The goal of the SEL program being studied was to promote resiliency skills to help children overcome the adverse situation of homelessness and the stressors leading up to homelessness. The SEL program was designed to achieve this goal in two ways: creating a camp environment that was supportive and nurturing and by instructing students in the area of social and emotional competencies. As this was the first year of implementations, this study sought to examine how well the program was designed to meet the needs of the children it served, how well it adhered to that program design and what impact the program had on the children. The research questions were as follows:

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To what extent the SEL program was designed to meet the needs of the children being served? To what extent the SEL program was implemented as designed? To what extent were the goals of the program met?

3 Methods

3.1 Evaluation Design and Instruments

Stufflebeam's (2003) CIPP model was used as a framework for the evaluating the SEL program. The model emphasizes evaluation of the context, inputs, and process in addition to the product of the program. This model was a good fit for this study due to the program being in the early stages of implementation. The camp had available naturally existing data-sources that were used as part of this case study including post-training evaluation surveys, training attendance logs, self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006). meeting notes from program development meetings, field notes from site observations, SEL curriculum guide, and the SEL lesson log. Additionally, new data were collected from camp administrators and staff via post program surveys and focus groups interviews. The following is a description of instruments administered for the purpose of this program evaluation.

3.1.1 Post-program survey

A survey was distributed to the seven camp instructors, the camp director, the assistant camp director, the volunteer coordinator, and the nurse aide in order to gain information on the program implementation and the staff's perception of campers' growth in the area of social-emotional competencies. This survey was designed to provide some preliminary answers to the product evaluation questions. The first section of the survey addressed the staff assessment of children's growth in social-emotional competencies during the camp. The five SEL competencies addressed in the survey correlated with the work of CASEL: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2015). The second section of the survey assesses the environment of the camp. The Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) was used as a guide for the development of the second section (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005). For the survey, the PQA indicators for supportive environment, safe environment, staff interactions, and engagement were developed into survey questions. In order to ensure construct and face validity, this survey instrument was reviewed by two colleagues, both experts in research. These colleagues compared the survey instrument with the research questions in order to confirm alignment and proofed the survey for ambiguity.

3.1.2 Focus group interviews

Focus groups can be used for a variety of purposes including determining program needs, program improvement, and outcome evaluation (Massy, 2011). A structured approach was used in the focus group interviews in which the moderator had five topic questions to guide the discussion. The focus group interview was done in one session. Two hours were allocated to conduct the interview. Returning camp instructors were invited to participate in the focus group interviews.

The results of the survey data were analyzed by reporting the percentages as well as the frequency of each response in order to evaluate the context, inputs, process and products in this program. An excel spreadsheet was used to compile data. Survey and focus group data were triangulated with the post-training evaluations, observations feedback reports, and the self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence.

4 Results

4.1 Research Question 1: To What Extent was the SEL Program Designed to Meet the Needs of the Children Being Served?

The goal of the SEL component of the summer camp was to build the resiliency skills of children experiencing homelessness in order to overcome the adverse stressors leading up to and including homelessness. This is aligned with the needs of the children the camp serves. The SEL program was designed to have a dual focus on building social-emotional competencies and creating a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. The program was designed to allow children in acute financial hardship and with housing insecurities to gain access and benefit. The camp was free and the children were provided with materials and supplies - such as swimsuits, backpacks and writing materials- in order participated in the camp activities. Additionally, each SEL lesson was independent rather than sequential, allowing children with irregular attendance, due to their housing insecurities, to gain benefit.

The camp was designed to create a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment as indicated by pre-camp training agenda, training logs, and skills monitoring tools. Prior to service, all paid staff and volunteer counselors were required to participate in training to develop skills for creating a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment; instruction on delivering the SEL curriculum; and group management techniques that build SEL competencies. Training attendance logs indicate that 100% of paid staff were trained prior to working at the camp. The program design included tools such as cue cards, daily volunteer debriefing and weekly self-report inventory of practices to promote social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006) in order to monitor use of resiliency building skills and facilitate staff and volunteer self-reflection.

The training evaluation surveys from the first two training sessions were useful in determining to what extent the staff and volunteers were adequately trained in skills and strategies used in the SEL program. The surveys included 12 Likert-type scale questions and two open-ended questions. Ninety-four percent of the training participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the training provided them with strategies for developing resiliency skills. Ninety percent of the participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they have a better understanding of the biological, psychological and social-emotional developmental needs of the children. One hundred percent of the participants indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident in their ability to help children at the camp as a result of the training. One hundred percent of the paid staff indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the format and delivery for the SEL curriculum whereas 90% of the volunteers indicated they understood the format for delivery of the SEL curriculum.

The level of staff preparation was triangulated through a review of the self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006). The instructors rated themselves and their volunteers on indicators of use of resiliency skills by indicating if they use the skill consistently, occasionally or seldom. The responses from the end of the first week of camp were examined to determine the extent to which the instructors felt prepared. Instructors rated themselves and volunteers as consistently or occasionally using the skills during the first week of camp at a rate of 97%. Only 3% of the responses were rated "seldom." The area of self-awareness building skills is notable for the positive responses in Week 1. All instructors rated themselves as using these skills at the highest level. The instructors also gave the volunteers the highest ratings in three of the four indicators of self-awareness building skills.

This research question was further triangulated through an analysis of the focus group interviews. Several staff members reported that they were cognizant of the appropriate resiliency building staff responses and understood the format and purpose of the SEL lessons. Two participants indicated that the final component of the training was the "hands-on" learning that happens when the skills are used or the lesson is delivered in the camp. As one instructor indicated "The more you practice, the better you get at it." Another instructor indicated that she believed staff's comfort level would be better in the subsequent camp session because over half the instructors were returning and had experience implementing the SEL program.

4.2 Research Question 2: To what extent was the SEL program was implemented as designed?

Delivery of the SEL curriculum. The lesson logs reveal that the lessons were delivered as planned with a few exceptions. During Weeks 1, 3, 5, and 6 all six instructors implemented the full curriculum—three lessons. On Weeks 4 and 7, one instructor implemented two lessons instead of three. Week 2 stands out as an exception where only half of the instructors delivered the full three lessons and two instructors only delivered one lesson during the week. This was explained, in part, by camp being closed for Independence Day that week as well as an excessive heat advisory which forced modifications to the camp schedule.

The field observation reports from week three and week seven of camp indicated that the SEL program was implemented as evidenced by student work, morning meetings, and lesson observations. The report cites campers' SEL work on display in the hallway and multi-purpose room of the camp base building. The focus group interviews and the comments on the lesson logs helped to identify issues interfering in the implementation of the SEL curriculum. Three comments on the lesson logs indicated that the heat in the outdoor environment interfered in the lesson delivery. Additionally, lesson logs evidenced difficulty in delivering the SEL curriculum to the youngest campers during the first two weeks. The instructor of the pre-kindergarten group indicated that she was not able to effectively implement any of the lessons during the first week of camp. In the second week, she only attempted to deliver one lesson with limited success. The lessons in the third week had been modified using feedback from the first week and the instructor of the pre-kindergarten group reported a more positive experience with implementation.

Staff use of SEL-building skills. The responses to self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006) were analyzed in terms of the percentage of "consistent" responses across all five domains. Figure 1 shows the instructor's overall rating of the use of the skills for promoting social-emotional competence. The instructors rated their use of the SEL promoting skills at 70% in Week 1. The graph in Figure 1 shows that there was a steady increase in the self-report of consistent use of these skills. The instructors' ratings of their volunteers' consistent use of skills to promote social-emotional competence were lower than their ratings of their own use of these skills.
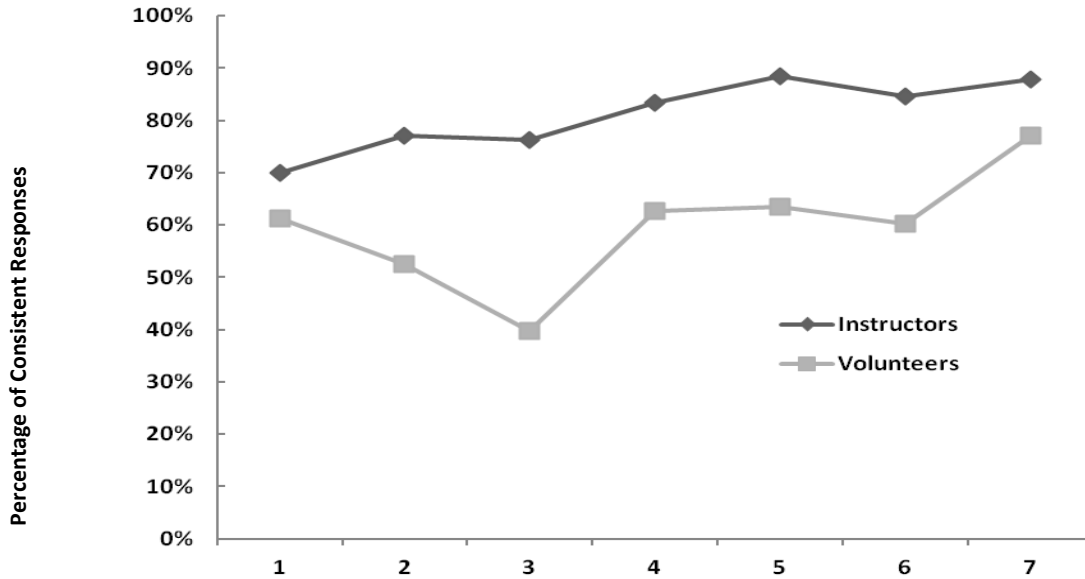

Fig 1. Results of self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006) by week

The self-report inventory was also analyzed by examining the percentage of responses indicating "consistent" use of skills by domain (see Figure 2). Skills for promoting self-awareness had the highest percentage of "consistent" responses among the instructors with a 97% "consistent" response rate for themselves and 73% for their volunteers. The lowest ranking "consistent" response rate was skills for promoting self-management, with a 68% response rate for the instructors and 53% for their volunteers.
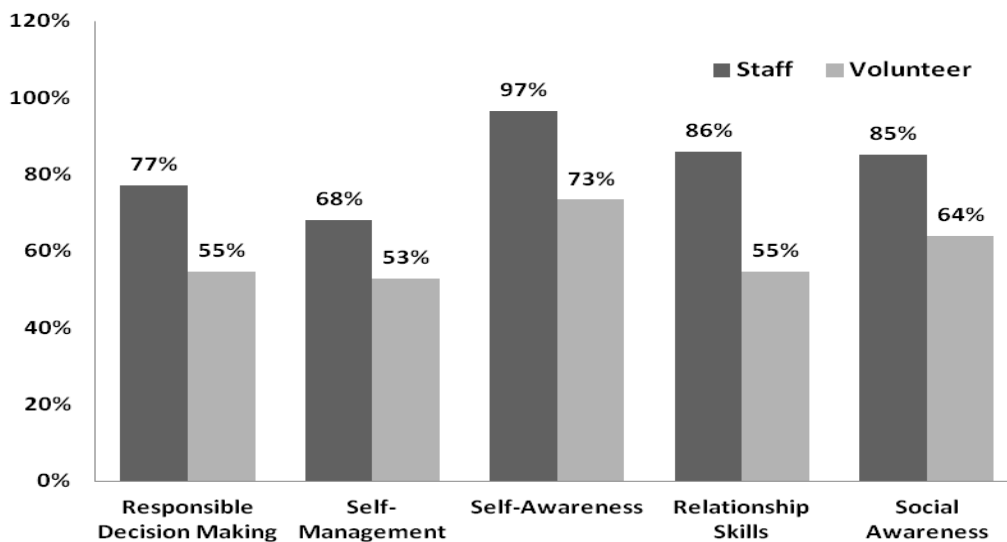

Fig 2. Results of self-report inventory of practices for promoting social-emotional competence (CSEFEL, 2006) by domain

The instructors' understanding of the importance of the resiliency building skills was made clear during the focus group interviews. One instructor stated she felt the resiliency building skills were the only way to impact social-emotional competencies of some of the neediest children of the camp. According to the instructor, it was these more transient children who needed the program the most—the students who flowed in and out of the program due to extremely unstable housing situations. In her opinion, one or two SEL lessons were not as impacting as the way the children were treated by the staff and volunteers on the few days they attended camp. Another instructor commented that the resiliency building approach to behavior management was the most important thing that staff could do in order build resiliency in campers. She also commented that the volunteers needed more reinforcement in their use of these skills. Another focus group response was "Kids tested limits. I feel like we successfully used things we learned in the training to deal with this."

The field observation feedback report corroborated the need for more reinforcement of the resiliency-building skills with the volunteers. The field observation report notes several examples of volunteers using encouragement and skillful redirection of misbehavior. Volunteers were observed guiding campers' behaviors with words of encouragement rather than words of reprimand. This was exemplified in statements such as "you did such a good job yesterday, let's do that again." In another interaction, a volunteer encouraged appropriate camper behavior by praising campers who were following directions and rewarding them with "high-fives" in order to encourage two boys to join the group. However, not all volunteers demonstrated the same level of skill in all situations. This was observed most notably during transition or unstructured times. Many volunteers were observed sitting by themselves or grouped away from the children instead of interacting with the campers.

4.3 Research Question 3: To what extent were the goals of the program met?

Safe, supportive and nurturing environment. Responses in the focus group interview affirmed that the environment at the summer camp was a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment. One staff member said, "Some volunteers counselors were calling and asking if they could come back and volunteer again." Other staff responded with "Kids felt safe, loved and cared for," and "Kids kept coming back every day, even if they had issues." Seven staff members responded to the post-camp survey. The survey identified nine indicators of a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment. One hundred percent of staff indicated that they "agree" or "strongly agree" that six of the nine indicators were present at the camp. Only one indicator solicited a "disagree" response—that program space and furniture could accommodate the activities offered. The issue of the physical facilities was also discussed in the observation feedback report. One observation was conducted on an inclement weather day in which the campers used the facilities of the Head Start center instead of their normal space under the tents in the public park. The report indicated that the space in the Head Start Center was not set up for to accommodate the campers. Head Start furniture was piled on one side of the room in what appeared to be for preparations for summer cleaning. Campers and volunteer counselors sat on the tiled floors for the lessons. Although there was a covered park pavilion available to the summer camp, the staff indicated that they chose not to use it due to remnants of illicit activities that occurred in the pavilion most nights. Staff became discouraged after cleaning up the space only to return the next morning to have the space unusable again.

Growth in social emotional competencies of the children. Seven instructors responded to the post camp survey. Five survey items asked for the instructors' assessment of the campers' social-emotional growth and development as a result of the summer camp. The area of self-awareness was the highest rated by staff with 100% (n=7) agreeing or strongly agreeing that campers showed growth in this area as evidenced by being able to identify some of their strengths, feelings, and values. Eighty-six percent of the staff respondents (n=6) agreed or strongly agreed that campers showed growth in the area of social awareness and relationship skills. Indicators of campers' growth in social awareness and relationship skills included campers' abilities to view the perspectives of others, to understand each other's feelings, to identify similarities and differences between themselves and others, to cooperate with others, to listen, to take turns, and to resolve conflicts positively. Staff assessed campers' development of self-management skills as the least improved. Only 57% (n=4) of staff responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that campers showed growth in self-management skills as indicated by perseverance and expressing feelings appropriately. Seventy percent (n=5) of the staff responded that they agree or strongly agree that campers showed growth in the area of responsible decision making. Indicators of growth in responsible decision are gains made in problem solving, goal setting, and compliance with rules. Survey responses were validated through the triangulation of the data using the focus group interviews.

In the focus group interview, one staff member summed up the general assessment of campers SEL growth by saying, "In some campers, we saw big improvements from Week 1 to Week 8. Others could have used more time." Another staff member gave an anecdotal story of a camper who was extremely timid during swimming time. The staff later learned that the camper had had a traumatic experience around the water. The staff member reported that this camper slowly progressed throughout the summer, getting closer and closer to the water, finally touching his toes to the water, and by the end of camp, the boy would actually jump into the water. The staff member attributes this progress not to athletic development, but to his social-emotional growth and development while at the summer camp.

One staff member identified a particular area of frustration in assisting in the growth of campers in SEL. She indicated that many of the students who appeared to need the most help were the ones that "bounced" in and out of the program. Another staff member indicated that it was harder to impact the SEL development of some of the older campers who were already exhibiting significant maladaptive behaviors.

5 Discussion

Homelessness is often accompanied by separation from loved ones, loss of community, peer group, possessions and privacy (Bassuk, & Friedman, 2005). Adding to this, a disproportionate number of children experiencing homelessness have experienced family violence and are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse (Bassuk, & Friedman, 2005; Bassuk, 2010). As a result of these factors, children experiencing homelessness are at high risk of negative life trajectories (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Luthar, & Zigler, 1991; Masten et al., 2012). Recent research has shown that it is possible to strengthen attributes of a child and his or her environment in order to mitigate the negative consequences of such risk factors (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008). Social emotional learning programs are a promising means to mitigate these risk factors by creating a safe, supportive and nurturing environment and focusing on building social competencies. Strong social-emotional competencies can help children overcome and persevere despite adversity (Bassuk, 2010; Buckner, et al., 2009; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Hamby et al., 2018). Bassuk (2010) describes that among other characteristics, good problem-solving skills, relationships with caring adults, and the ability to self-regulate distinguish the resilient child who has experienced homelessness from the vulnerable child. Children who participate in SEL programs that adhere to best practices show an increase in social-emotional skills, positive attitudes towards themselves and others, positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, lower levels of emotional distress, and better academic performance (Payton, et al., 2008).

The summer program being evaluated did, in fact, help children experiencing homelessness improve their social emotional competencies. The majority of camp staff assessed that children made gains in social-emotional competencies as a result of their participation in the summer camp. One hundred percent of the staff who completed the post-camp surveys indicated that they felt the campers improved their competencies in the area of self-awareness, while 86% of the staff felt the campers improved in the area of social awareness and relationship skills. The results for staff assessment of campers' growth in the areas of responsible decision making and self-management were not as strong with 70% and 57% assessing growth in those respective areas. These early findings on the impact of this SEL program on children's competencies showed promising results. The Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified the following five core social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2018). The SEL curriculum developed for the summer camp sought to directly teach skills in these five competency areas. In addition to the SEL curriculum, the camp sought to teach social-emotional skills through enrichment activities planned around weekly themes.

Bassuk and Friedman (2005) recommend that programs that serve homeless families establish a safe, supportive, and nonthreatening environment. Children naturally build resiliency in an instructional setting when their teachers use a lot of praise and encouragement, are proactive instead of reactive, and implement fair disciplinary procedures (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008). Unfortunately, many teachers from schools in poor neighborhoods are less likely to interact with children in a manner that builds resiliency. These children are more likely to have experienced harsher, detached, and insensitive teaching techniques, staff behaviors that increase risk rather than foster resiliency (Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes. & Whitebook, 1994; Evans, 2004). In creating a supportive and nurturing environment, the camp sought to eliminate such negative staff behaviors by providing staff with new strategies that promote positive social emotional growth in children.

In order to achieve this, all staff that interacted with the campers (instructors, camp administrators, nurse-aide and volunteer counselors) were trained in skills that foster a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. Skills taught in pre-camp training were reinforced through daily debriefing sessions with volunteers, a weekly, a weekly self-reflection inventory, and cue cards to help staff and volunteers remember and use the proactive strategies taught in pre-camp training.

The staff assessment of the camp environment was that it is safe, supportive and nurturing. Six of the seven staff respondents strongly agreed that the camp provided a physically safe environment. Six of seven staff respondents agreed that the staff provided a welcoming atmosphere and used encouragement to support children. The camp instructors and volunteer counselors used the resiliency-building skills in their daily interactions with the campers. Staff behaviors and responses to children can help foster resiliency-building skills (Landy, 2009). Camp instructors demonstrated use of these skills on a consistent basis, providing an opportunity for the vulnerable children in the program to build protective factors in order to overcome the extreme adversity they face.

5.1 Limitations

This research had several potential limitations. First, the generalizability of the findings is limited because the study was conducted on only one site. This is a threat to the external validity of the study. Additionally, by studying one, relatively small program, the sample size was also small. In order to mitigate the impact of this limitation, efforts were made to collect data from all potential respondents. Another potential limitation was the use of an acquaintance group in the focus group interview. The group of instructors was a naturally occurring group. As such, they had shared experiences and relationships beyond the context of the focus group interview. These experiences, negative or positive, had the potential to inhibit or otherwise influence responses of participants. Additionally, pre- and post-testing of children's social-emotional learning outcomes could not be secured due to the retrospective design of the study. Finally, outside factors may have impacted the results of this evaluation. The experience and skill level of instructors and volunteers, issues at the shelters, and weather conditions are among the variables that may have impacted the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, the transient nature of the population the camp served is a significant limitation. Many children moved in and out of the program due to housing instability, and therefore did not participate in the programs in its entirety.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that on-going evaluations of the SEL program at the study site continue in order to facilitate a process of continuous self-improvement. Further, a more in-depth product evaluation is recommended in order to further measure children's social-emotional growth as a result of participation in the SEL program. This could be done using evidence-based instruments in a pre- and posttest design. An additional area of study would be the application of this SEL program in another summer camp or summer learning program.

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