**Building Resilience after Disaster: An After School Intervention Program**

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**Introduction**

Through this project, a theoretical after-school program was created to support three children experiencing varying levels of trauma response following a natural disaster. The purpose of this after-school intervention is to ameliorate the children’s experience post-traumatic events by improving resilience factors and tactics the children possess. Using information gathered from protective and risk factors, family systems, neurobiology, school environment, and the resilience framework for action, the after-school program was developed with specifically the fictional Sunnyside Elementary eight-year-old students in mind.

**Scenario**

Included in the scenario are three children and one counselor, all part of a community that recently experienced a severe thunderstorm and tornado. The children are eight years old and each within the same elementary school classroom. One child, Anna, had extremely close proximity to the natural disaster both in physicality and via the loss of a grandparent. This child is very intelligent and normally loves to attend school. Anna has lots of friends and two involved parents at home. Prior to the disaster, Anna was very close with her grandmother and the loss has weighed heavily on her mother, and therefore, the entire family system. Since then, Anna has become reclusive, nervous, and disinterested in her schoolwork and friendships. Her father sees this difference but struggles to help as he is also dealing with his wife’s loss. Anna is also experiencing nightly distressing dreams and not sleeping. The second child, Jake, had damage to his home but was otherwise untouched. This student is average in school and normally has behavior issues, but is very social and outgoing. Jake lives with both parents and has multiple siblings, all of which he has a deep relationship with. Jake has become much quieter and solitary following the disaster, often falling asleep in class. The final child, Tom, lived in an area that was unharmed by the tornado. Tom is also an average student who was heavily involved in sports at the school. His parents are recently divorced, but both are very supportive and involved in Tom's life. Tom’s parents have noticed that he seems to be less disciplined and disinterested in sports after the tornado.

**Intervention**

As schools are one of the most important systems in young children’s lives with regard to resilience, this intervention involves an after-care program within the community’s elementary school. This program meets twice per week for an hour each. The after-school program is strength-focused, meaning it builds up the already prominent, resilient features of each child and adds strategies to their resilience toolboxes. Upon walking into the classroom after school, the children are greeted by the school’s counselor and assigned roles for snack time. One child passes out the preferred snacks and they are given ten minutes to sit at the table and talk with the other children. After, during clean-up time, the others are assigned roles of trash collector and table wiper. Following snack time, the group moves into games. It is important in the program to make it feel like playtime rather than therapy. The group’s first game is Emotion Jenga. Each Jenga piece has either the name of an emotion (ex. surprise) or a question (ex. what is your favorite sweet treat?). If an emotion block is pulled, the child must think of a time when they felt that emotion. If a question block is pulled, the child must answer. Each session will also include a form of team-building activity, such as the human knot or a blindfolded partner obstacle course. Along with large group exercises, one-on-one interactions between the teachers and children exist to foster deep connections between each child and teacher. The intervention wants to create a safe and comfortable environment so the children have a sense of belonging and feel more inclined to participate in the activities within this intervention. But, if they are struggling with coping or are feeling overwhelmed, they can take a few minutes in the calm corner. This area of the classroom will have pillows for comfort, books for quiet reading, as well as a worry box. The children can write or draw what they are feeling if they choose to. Afterward, they may fold up their paper and place it in the worry box as a way to physically release anxieties.

**Defining Resilience**

Resilience, according to this course, is defined as “doing okay or recovering well after exposure to challenges that threaten function or development” (Masten, 2014), and being able to withstand adversity. This definition has shifted to a broader, now being, “the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten its stability, viability or development” (Masten, 2014). The overall goal of this intervention with Anna, Jake, and Tom is to promote resilience and build their resilience in a natural and safe space. No individual will become resilient at the same rate, it varies across development as well as the environment. Anna, Jake, and Tom all experienced a traumatic storm in different ways, therefore their resilience journeys will vary. When deciding whether a child is resilient, there needs to be measurable criteria, which can include academics, mental health, happiness, or developmental tasks (Masten, 2014). Specifically, with children the ages of Anna, Jake, and Tom, the developmental tasks can include going to school, behaving properly, and getting along with other children. This intervention demonstrates these tasks when the children show up to the after-school program and participate in Emotion Jenga, Rose, Bud and Thorn, Human Knot, and other team-building activities. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory plays a role in how these children react and are affected by the traumatic event as well as their development of resilience. All systems in these children’s lives are interdependent. Therefore there are many elements that will impact the children as they strive to move forward past the traumatic storm, including family, peers, community, school, parent’s workplace, state, and multiple other systems. This intervention focuses on the microsystem which includes the school system and the classroom with the teacher and peers specifically. The intervention is run through the school and promotes interaction and social skills with other peers post-disaster.

**Defining Natural Disasters**

Since natural disasters are incredibly common sources of trauma for children of all ages across the world, childhood resilience science often focuses on these sources of trauma. Natural catastrophes can cause post-traumatic symptoms such as re-experiencing, numbing, avoidance, arousal, and anxiety; Resilience is necessary for children to overcome these symptoms and recover. Specifically, tornados are devastating natural disasters that derive seemingly out of thin air, leaving major destruction in their wake. They are often unpredictable and difficult to plan for. As in this scenario, these storms ravage communities in an unforeseeable manner, leaving some individuals devastated while others are untouched. Looking at resilience in regards to tornadoes and other disasters, one of the most important concepts is *dosage*. Whether this is via physical proximity, high emotional toll, a high magnitude of personal loss, or continued exposure to media, larger doses of a natural disaster prolong the effects of trauma and require greater amounts of resilience to overcome. Individuals that experience a larger culmination of dosages from the combined effects of trauma often exhibit more signs of Post Traumatic Stress (PTS).

**Resilience Findings in Regards to Disasters and Pathways**

Past natural disasters, including Buffalo Creek and the 2004 tsunami of Sri Lanka all concluded with common findings (Masten, 2014). Dose effects, age effects, trauma symptoms, and gender differences were all similar and experienced by all children in the studies. The same outcome is seen in the scenario. In terms of the dose-effect, Anna was the closest in proximity and experienced the loss of a loved one. Therefore her symptoms were very high, her bubbly personality became shy and she was not invested in her previously successful schoolwork. Jake also had close proximity, with no harm to himself or his family. There is a noticeable difference in his behavior in school and his class clown regularities are no longer present. As for Tom, he was the furthest from the disaster but his acting out is partially caused by his community being affected, as well as by the new and unusual behaviors of his peers. All three children are eight-years-old and as demonstrated in the intervention, they are all at the age that they have an understanding of what has happened to their families and their community. This is shown by how they present themselves and show their emotions, specifically with Anna’s repetitive nightmares. She is at a young enough age to have these nightmares and sleeping problems because of the storm. Finally, the difference in gender. It is common for females to internalize their feelings and there is a larger focus on mental health. As seen with Anna, she has become quiet and needs to be prompted to talk about her feelings. On the contrary, both Jake and Tom have had obvious behavior changes, common for males. Specifically, Tom lashes out at his fellow peers, as well as his teacher. Although each child was initially affected by the disaster either directly or indirectly, they all show positive improvement by the next month of intervention. They all follow the Stress Resistant *pathway of resilience* and recovery. This model shows individuals first negatively respond to trauma, but subsequently follow an upward curve to improvement after the initial shock.

**Protective and Risk Factors**

Honing to what helps or hinders resilience in the disaster setting, protective factors are characteristics, qualities, or assets that provide a lower chance of negative outcomes or reduce the risk of effects from a certain event or impact. The more protective factors a child has, the less severe impact a traumatic event will have on that child. Anna, Jake, and Tom all experienced different protective factors. Anna has the most protective factors from the beginning. She is intelligent, motivated, and she loves to go to school. She has a lot of friends and loves to socialize. She also has a strong relationship with her parents and grandparents. Jake’s protective factors include being a social butterfly at school and often being seen as the class clown, therefore being well-liked. He has a strong relationship with his family, specifically with his multiple siblings. As for Tom, he is very involved in sports at school. His parents were recently divorced, but they both play a large role in his life and are supportive of him. The latter are risk factors. Risk factors increase the risk of something negative happening, *increasing vulnerability*. When it comes to risk predictors, it is said that a higher risk predicts a worse outcome (Masten, 2014). This is confirmed in the intervention with Jake and Tom. Prior to the disaster happening, Jake’s risk predictor in relation to school is that he experiences behavior problems and Tom’s risk predictor is going through his parent's recent divorce. Moderators are also key to pointing out the relationship between protective and risk factors, which will be discussed later with the importance of parents and caregivers. Other possible moderators are genetics, personality, family routines, cultural beliefs, and relationships. These moderators link the relationship between adversity and how the child is doing.

**Resilience in the Family**

Aspects of the family can serve as both a protective and risk factor for children depending on each individual circumstance. Roles and routines provide balance, growth, cohesion, and stability within the family system and restore function if there is any sort of disturbance (Masten, 2014). In this scenario, Anna’s family system was disrupted by the loss of her grandmother. Despite this tragedy, Anna’s strong relationship with both of her parents helped them cope as a collective family system. Anna’s mom started enforcing the idea of having family dinners every night in order to restore routine and build connectedness within the family. This simple adjustment has allowed Anna to better cope and share about her day at school and her emotions.

Another aspect of the family system is the attachment between a child and their caregivers. *Secure attachment* is attributed to sensitive and responsible caregiving. It is often taken into account when discussing parenting effectiveness, which relates to resilience being promoted by parents. Competence and resilience in children have been linked with authoritative parenting, which is characterized by having a balance of warmth and responsiveness and high expectations and demands. In the face of adverse events like a tornado, parents can lower fear, anxiety, and physiological levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Proximity to parents acts as a buffer against trauma because of the consistency in the care they provide (Masten, 2014). All three students in the intervention have highly supportive and authoritarian parents that serve as a protective factor. In Jake’s case, his parents are still happily married and continue to be supportive by attending all of his sporting events. These relationships provide Jake with an additional protective factor and support system. Anna’s parents are constantly communicating through their warm family dinner environment that promotes openness. Tom’s parents are divorced. Evidence shows that interparental conflict can cause negative effects on social competence, which can help explain why he acts out during class. Despite the recent divorce, one thing Tom’s parents demonstrate as an effective family system is flexibility through caring for Tom in a co-parenting perspective.

**Neurobiology of Resilience**

Neurobiology is also crucial to childhood resilience. Recent advances in neuroscience, such as the fMRI available to capture images of the active human brain, have opened many new resilience research opportunities. Recent developments have been categorized as the “fourth wave”, which includes many advances in technology, adaptation and development of genes, brain function and development, epigenetic change, and adaptive systems within the human organism in knowledge about the human organism. Early biological models, such as vaccination against disease, have transformed into much more complex ideas. A *moderator* reduces the impact of adversity; in the case of vaccinations, a vaccine is a threat-activated moderator, which protects against a particular threat, such as the COVID-19 vaccine against COVID-19. This intervention can also be viewed as a threat-activated moderator, as social services were produced in the form of an after-school program to help children as part of a natural disaster response.

**Mastery Motivation and Executive Function**

It is also extremely important to touch on the neurobiology of adaptive systems, which include attachment, motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive skills. Mastery motivation and other related reward systems are very powerful in the ability of individuals to persist in the face of challenges. The more one succeeds, the more likely they are to continue. In the intervention, the children are assigned roles to complete as part of the classroom community. By successfully completing their role during snack time, the children are encouraged to continue participating in the large group activities, thus perceiving themselves as self-sufficient and creating more opportunities for positive social interaction. The power of perceived effectiveness is related to mastery motivation which is also seen in the intervention through the team-building exercises such as the Human Knot where teamwork encourages successful completion of the activity. This encourages the child to continue attempting challenging tasks.

In each of these tasks, the children also must exhibit self-control and self-regulation as they work alongside their peers. This is a very important concept in relation to executive function, which is described as “neurocognitive capacities to control attention, emotion, impulses, [and] behavior” (Masten, 2014). *Executive functions* are crucial for learning, adapting to change, planning, and getting along with others. In relation to emotion regulation, children must exhibit inhibition, planification, and flexibility, all of which are practiced during the team-building exercises.

**The Shortlist and Ordinary Magic**

Alongside capable caregiving and parenting, it is stated in the shortlist created by Ann Masten (2014) that effective schools and well-functioning communities are an essential part of a person's ability to be resilient. Ann Masten’s (2014) idea of ordinary magic also states that naturally occurring systems act as protective factors for a child during adverse experiences. With the school open again, it offers aspects of the shortlist such as the reestablishment of close relationships and opportunities to practice executive functioning skills. Through the after-school program, the children are able to build secure attachments with the adults and their peers in natural social bonding activities including snacks and free time. Structured games such as Jenga and Human Knot allow them to practice skills such as problem-solving and emotional regulation.

**Roles of Schools in Resilience**

Schools specifically play key roles in child development and resilience. The program strives to build executive function skills, provide opportunities for relationships with peers and adults, and offer supplemental snacks and water to ensure basic needs are being met. The *adult relationships* that are created in schools offer a secure attachment through caring, mentorship, and the child’s understanding that someone believes in them. In the scenario, the adult at the after-school program is caring, with encouraging comments and sincere engagement. The adult uses a star chart in the classroom to show the students that they believe in their success and can talk the children through challenging situations by referencing past accomplishments.

In order for schools to play a role in resilience for children, the school itself must be resilient to adverse experiences. This includes having a positive environment with strong leadership and *effective teachers* that are defined as warm with definite structure and expectations (Masten, 2014). In the scenario’s after-school program, the teacher welcomes each student with positive interaction and continues to set expectations for the students to engage with each other during the routine schedule. By always beginning with snack time, the students recognize this activity as a transition from school into the program and are comforted by the consistency of the situation. *After-school programs* foster resilience differently than in the general school classrooms by offering opportunities for leadership and strengthening previously learned skills. During snack time the counselor distributes roles for the students allowing them to feel responsible for the environment and build human capital by completing tasks that benefit their community. The afterschool program fosters the development of learned skills that can benefit the child’s performance in school, giving tools for emotional regulation, problem-solving, and increasing confidence in the classroom.

**Adaptive Systems**

Further, adaptive systems in the child and community are fostered within the school systems. The adaptive systems in a child require good nutrition for the brain both physically and cognitively via learning and support from the community. It is important for the child to have opportunities to practice mastery of motivation and learn to be flexible as they persist through challenges. The Human Knot game offered in the afterschool program gives students the opportunity to practice these skills. They must regulate their frustration or excitement in order to work together as a team and figure out how to become un-knotted. The children are able to practice these skills because of the adaptive systems in the community*.* The afterschool program allows children to have a secure attachment to either the environment or the teacher so they can play and observe in a learning context (Masten, 2014). Because of the secure attachment, the children are able to experiment with the way they play and interact knowing that they are in a safe place where they are motivated to make mistakes and continue looking for the solutions. The program also provides opportunities for life-course attachment with the adults and peers by providing emotional and instrumental protection to the child and the community. This is shown by the students looking out for their peers and noticing the positive way they can contribute to their community.

**The Five Principles of Intervention**

In an effort to promote resilience after a natural disaster, this intervention follows the 5 principles of intervention. The calm corner provides children with the first two principles of intervention; a calming environment and a sense of safety. Their school is a place where the children are comfortable as it is somewhere they regularly interact. They also have a familiar, trusted adult that they are able to depend on and feel safe with. The team-building games build upon the third principle, a sense of connectedness through social interaction and teamwork. In the Jenga activity, the students can also form connections and relate their emotional experiences to each other. The Jenga activity, as well as role assigning, also promote the 4th principle of intervention, self-efficacy. During the game, the children can share ways they coped after they experienced a negative emotion. Other students can then listen and build confidence on how they can better cope and are able to react differently the next time they are put into a difficult situation. In doing so, the children are *building hope* for the future, the 5th principle. By continuously giving children a “normal” environment to spend time in, hope would also be increased. All teachers in charge of the intervention reassured the children that any reactions were normal, to instill “hope against distressing thoughts” such as “I’m going crazy” and “My reaction is a sign that I can’t take it”. These five principles of the intervention are backed by empirical evidence and are most effective in the early to mid-term stages, and with aspects of each principle included in the after-school program, the intervention has the best possibility of being effective.

**Resilience Framework for Action in Intervention**

It must be noted that children need immediate help after enduring trauma. Resilience can be cultivated through strategic intervention, and can also prevent future or heightened problems by promoting positive strategies before traumatic events occur. To act successfully, the elements of the Resilience Framework for Action (Masten, 2014) must be adhered to, emphasizing the importance of the Mission, Models, Measures, Methods, and Multiple Levels. This case study lacks the ability to claim the community had previously promoted resilience successfully. Hopefully, the community was well equipped with citizens and teachers who modeled the importance of teamwork and positive attitude and previously promoted resilience traits beforehand. In the present after-school intervention, each teacher working with individual students is well-versed in resilience science. During one-on-one interactions, each adult records the protective factors, symptoms of trauma and other vulnerabilities, and resources the child has. This information is crucial for the success of the intervention in adhering to the individual needs and problems of each child, acting similar to scaffolding. If the child’s mental and physical state is understood accurately, the people helping them post-trauma will be better able to push them the right amounts toward resilience and healing. The teachers in the after-school program also act as positive influences and mentors during the difficult time. The tracking of accomplishments and gains of each child is beneficial for the child to be able to physically see, such as the individual star chart, as it promotes confidence in the child.

As for the method of intervention, the intervention is process-focused. After the natural disaster, it is important to restore a sense of normalcy as well as improve the actions of the previously mentioned human adaptive systems. This intervention program aims to do this, as the children are able to interact with a “normal” group of children, do “normal” activities such as play games, read, draw, and access teachers who were positive role models in their lives beforehand. It also focuses on encouraging the use of and improving the children’s self-regulation and cognitive skills. The many sectors of resilience the child will encounter during their time in the intervention (community, individual, and school) will be extremely helpful to encourage their own resilience.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Anna, Jake, and Tom all benefited from the after school intervention, increasing their resilience and working to move past their personal traumatic experiences. Each child built upon their coping skills, connectedness, self-efficacy, and calmness, allowing their PTS symptoms to dwindle, and their lives to slowly move back towards normalcy. Resilience in children as a whole is necessary to overcome life’s challenges and improve overall quality or mental health, and therefore quality of life.

**References**

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**Appendix A.**

**Oral Presentation Script**

**SCRIPT:**

Narrator: Today we are going to observe a day in an after school intervention for Sunnyside Elementary school’s 3rd graders after the community experienced a severe thunderstorm and tornado. After school programs are great for giving opportunities for leadership and strengthening the current skills the students’ have in order to foster resilience. Let’s start by watching snacktime.

\*\* anna enters\*\*\*

Teacher: Hi there Anna! Your role today is to hand out napkins to everyone. How was your morning?

Child 1 (Anna): ok…. \*afraid\*

Narrator: This is Anna. She is 8 years old and had the closest physical proximity and most loss during the storm. Anna’s house was damaged and she lost her grandmother, which has weighed heavily on her family system. As Anna walks in, the teacher is handing out roles to ensure each child feels that they have responsibility and to help build self efficacy.

\*\* jake enters \*\*

Teacher: Hi Jake! Your job today is to pass out the snacks. Do you remember where to find them?

Child 2 (Jake): Yup.

Narrator: Jake was also close in physical proximity to the tornado. He lives with both his parents and is incredibly close with his 3 other siblings. Prior to the tornado, Jake was very outgoing, and considered the class clown, sometimes even a bit disruptive. Since the disaster, Jake has become very quiet in school and is often late and missing homework.

\*\* tom enters \*\*

Teacher: Hello Tom! Your position today is to help clean up and wipe down the tables after snacktime.

Child 3 (Tom): Are you kidding me? That is my least favorite job!

Teacher: I think you’re best at it. Do you want a friend to help you?

Child 3 (Tom): Nah, I got it.

Narrator: That was Tom. Tom lived in an area that was untouched by the tornado. He is an average student that is heavily involved in sports at his school. His parents were recently divorced but are both active and supportive in his life. Subconsciously he has noticed how his peers have been responding to the tornado. He is beginning to act out and doesn’t put much effort into his sports.

Teacher: Alright everybody, time for a game. We’re going to play Emotion Jenga today. On your turn, you will take a block and read the block’s word, and I’ll ask you a follow-up question. Is everyone ready? \*everyone nods\*

Narrator: Now they’re going to play Emotion Jenga, which is a game that focuses on working memory, flexible thinking, and inhibitory control, three aspects of executive functioning.

Child 1 (Anna): hmmm… \*pulls block\* This one says fear and has a scared face on it.

Teacher: Would you like to share about a time you got scared?

Child 1 (Anna): Um sure…. Sometimes I have bad dreams. Usually bad dreams about a big storm coming to blow my house away again.

Teacher: Thank you, Anna! That was very brave of you to share. Would anyone else like to share a story?

Child 2 (Jake): Sometimes I have bad dreams too. My mom always tells me to remember that it is just a dream and that we are safe in our house. And when I really can’t fall asleep we even list off things that make me feel safe.

Teacher: Thank you so much, Jake. That’s a great way to cope with intrusive thoughts– with reminders about reality. Tom would you like to share too?

Child 3 (Tom): I don’t have bad dreams, bad dreams are for little kids.

Teacher: Tom, even I have bad dreams! Does that mean I’m a little kid?

Narrator: This is one of the many games played in our intervention, called emotion jenga. As you saw, the children pull a block that either has an emoji and emotion word or a personal question on it. If an emotion block is pulled, the child must mention a time when they felt that emotion. These blocks play on executive function and allow the kids to share coping skills among each other. The children are able to socialize and learn to talk about their emotions in a healthy, positive manner.

Teacher: Okay, who’s next? Jake?

Child 2 (Jake): \*pulls block\* this has an animal shape on it..?

Teacher: Perfect! What animal do you feel best describes you?

Child 2 (Jake): Um I don’t know maybe a fish or something in the water.

Child 3 (Tom): Why don’t you at least pick a shark…

Teacher: Tom, instead of putting others down, it’s important to remember that everyone has different opinions. Fish and sharks can swim in the ocean together!

Narrator: Emotion Jenga also includes simple questions, such as talking about what animal you would be. This helps the children to get to know each other better and to foster connectedness and deeper relationships. Now, the class is moving onto another activity.

Teacher: Alright class! Now it's time for a team building activity! It's called the human knot. Let's stand in a circle, everyone cross your arms and then reach across and grab the hands of two different people. \*\*students and teacher form the knot \*\* Ready?

Narrator: Like the simple questions in emotion jenga, the team building activities are important in fostering connectedness among the students. Additionally, since the children have to work together, they must problem solve and emotionally regulate themselves within the team. Teamwork encourages successful completion of the activity. This encourages the child to continue attempting challenging tasks, which is referred to as Mastery Motivation.

\*\*\* “try” a few times to get untangled…….. Tom knots himself up and gets frustrated\*\*

Child 3 (Tom): I can't DO this!!! I don’t like this game. \*\*\* lets hands go, stomps, huffs and puffs\*\*

Teacher: Tom, maybe it's a good time to take a break. Why don’t you go take a breath and go get comfortable in the calm corner.

\*\*\* tom waddles over to the calm corner \*\*\*

Narrator: While Tom is sitting in the calm corner, he looks through the activity options.

Tom: Hmm, I don’t want to read, I don’t want to draw

Narrator: He decides to write down some of his worries for the worry box. The worry box allows students to express their worries without having to verbally explain themselves to a teacher. He can draw a picture of his worries, or even just write an emotion word and place it in the box.

Tom: \*walks back over\* I’m feeling a little better now. Can I join the game again?

Teacher: Of course! Let’s start again.

END SCENE ONE.

SCENE TWO.

Narrator: One month later, the children are back for another session. Students have already had snack time. They are noticeably more open and comfortable talking to each other …

\*Students talking to each other during free time\*

Teacher: Okay everybody! Let’s get in a circle. It’s time to do our Rose-Bud-Thorns of the week. Does anyone want to go first?

Tom: I will! My rose is being here with you guys, I was really looking forward to it during the school day today. My thorn is that I played really well in my soccer game last night but we still lost. Annnd my bud is that I can’t wait for our next meeting.

Jake: I'll go next! My rose is that last weekend we had chicken for our Sunday family dinner. My thorn is that the construction on my street keeps waking me up too early in the morning like 7 fricken o’clock!! And then my bud is that they are reopening the park next to my house on Saturday and some of my friends are meeting me there!

Anna: My rose is that I got an A on my math test today and we also had a yummy family dinner last night like Jake! Ummm my bud is going on the science museum field trip on Friday anddd my thorn is going to the cemetery to visit my grandma.

Tom: I’m sorry again about your Grandma, Anna. I’m sure she would be super proud of your grade on your math test!

Narrator: As you can see, the kids have made a lot of progress in the past couple of weeks. Tom no longer dreads coming to the after-school program, and is always excited to participate in whatever the afternoon holds. He’s starting to get back into his sports, and he’s making strong connections with the other children, even supporting Anna when she speaks about her thorn. Jake enjoys eating with his family and is looking forward to hanging out with his friends on Saturday, showing a return to normalcy within Jake’s life. Jake is able to utilize his emotional regulation to ensure himself that he is safe in his environment and create hope for things returning back to normal after the storm. Anna is starting to love school again and looks forward to each school day. She’s connecting with the other students in the intervention and is doing much better in school because she’s getting more sleep. She still struggles with the passing of her grandmother.

Teacher: Thank you for sharing everyone! You all can go outside to play. Anna, can I talk to you for a minute?

Anna: umm ya \*\*Anna walks over to teacher\*\*

Narrator: One-on-one interactions are a large part of fostering connections between teachers and students. This past month, the children have been collecting gold stars on their individual star charts. Each time the kids are kind, do something new, or answer a question, for example, the teacher gives them a star. The star charts are completely confidential to prevent competitive motivation and promote intrinsic motivation to succeed.

Teacher: How are you doing?

Anna: I’m doing pretty good, but sometimes I get sad when I think about my grandma. It came back again last night because of a nightmare I had.

Teacher: It's completely natural to feel sad and scared sometimes, Anna. Do you remember when we played the Jenga game?

Anna: Oh ya, I do remember! That’s when I was having a lot of nightmares. At least they’ve gotten better since then. I think Jake said something about how making a list helps him ..?

Teacher: Making a list of things that make you feel safe is a great idea! I’m really glad they’ve improved. You’ve seemed a lot more alert during the day. Should we look at your star chart to see what you’ve accomplished this month? It caught the corner of my eye earlier because its stars were so shiny!

Anna: Yes, that would be good!

Narrator: This afterschool program was created in an effort to promote and build resilience by fostering a sense of community and return to normalcy in the children’s lives. Anna, Jake, and Tom all benefited from the after school intervention, increasing their resilience and working to move past their personal traumatic experiences. Each child built upon their coping skills, connectedness, self-efficacy, and calmness, allowing their PTS symptoms to dwindle, and their lives to slowly move back towards normalcy. Resilience in children as a whole is necessary to overcome life’s challenges and improve overall quality or mental health, and therefore quality of life.