

Rolling Towards Change: Utilizing Judo and Community to Increase Promotive Factors

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Abstract

The [Riverside Youth Judo Club \(RYJC\)](#) is an established non-profit in the city of Riverside, California. Serving predominantly at-risk children, the Judo club seeks to create a community of support for some of the city's neediest children. Risk factors - such as poverty - can affect a child's development in a negative way, leading to poor executive functioning, a lack of self-regulation, and adverse social behavior with peers and at school. The theory of change described here takes the existing framework of the RYJC and adds another component, one-on-one mentorships. The goal of this intervention is to create peer-mentor relationships that increases the mentees self-efficacy, self-regulation skills, and helps increase promotive factors that result in positive developmental cascades.

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Human development is a continuous process. People do not grow in isolation, but rather find themselves influenced by a multitude of sources. These sources range from those close to them (proximal processes/other) to broader, more overarching influences like governmental organizations and the societal culture within which they are raised (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Current research informs us that development is particularly sensitive between the first two-three years of life, with another major period of growth between 11-13 years of age (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010). During these age ranges, developmental ‘explosions’ occur, with huge amounts of brain development.

The trajectory of development in life is not a straight line. From birth a number of factors play a role in helping create a concept of self; this concept doesn’t just relate to the individual’s notion of self, but also their understanding of where they fall within their broader context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This approach is referred to as the bioecological model and is detailed extensively in *The Bioecological Model of Human Development* by Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela Morris (2006). Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ bioecological model of development places a heavy emphasis on the importance of context in an individual’s development. The individual does not grow in a vacuum; rather he or she is constantly influenced by a multitude of factors that exist both within and outside his or her immediate environment.

Early childhood can have long standing impacts on a person’s development (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Jones & Zigler, 2002; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Sroufe, 2005). The opportunities that may be presented or withheld for children in their earliest years can have the largest developmental cascades.

Children at most risk include those in poverty (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Sroufe, 2005) and those who may have a family history of mental illness, abuse, or other risk factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Copeland et al., 2009; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Sroufe, 2005). Early interventions can play the role of a promotive factor in an individual's development (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Fisher, 2014; Jones & Zigler, 2002; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Sroufe, 2005). Healthy peer relationships and prosocial behavior also plays a role in positive development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2019; Melinder et al., 2010; Murry et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2006). Furthermore, peer relationships and mentor type relationships can have a promotive effect on individuals, as the mentor becomes what Bronfenbrenner & Morris refer to as the “proximal other” (p. 795) for the mentee. The closer in knowledge, skill level, and other factors (e.g. age) the mentor and mentee have, the greater the self-efficacy the mentee will have, improving outcomes for their growth and improvement (Bandura, 1994).

Judo is a martial art from Japan. The sport is recognized worldwide, and has been an event in the Summer Olympics since 1964. As a martial art, Judo is steeped in influences from Buddhism and other eastern philosophies and religions. This includes but is not limited to presence-of-mind, mindfulness, and meditation. Judo naturally lends itself to improving an individual's self-regulation skills (Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020). While Judo competitions and practice rely on the individual to put forth time and effort for the goal of improvement in the technical and philosophical aspects of the sport, no one person can practice the sport without a team.

Knowledgeable instructors are necessary to ensure proper form, and devoted teammates are key in promoting technical proficiency.

The Riverside Youth Judo Club (RYJC) is a non-profit organization that serves the youth of the city of Riverside, California. Established in 2013, it began by serving only at-risk children from some of the city's most challenging neighborhoods. Today, the RYJC is the largest Judo team in the United States, recognized internationally, and serves hundreds of children, including at-risk and special needs. The goal of the RYJC is to provide a supportive team environment that promotes community, education, respect, and resilience. The RYJC accomplishes this through utilizing the sport of Judo. The community-based approach of the RYJC seeks to create unbreakable bonds for children, parents, and instructors. However the current structure is split between the instructors and children. Self-efficacy in individuals within a group is lower when there is a large gap between certain characteristics of the 'proximal other' - in this case the relationships between the mentor and mentee (Bandura, 1994). According to research by Albert Bandura, "The impact of modeling on perceived self-efficacy is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models" (p. 3). The further in perceived similarities, the less reliable the mentor-mentee relationships can be.

To further increase promotive developmental factors for the children served, I propose a mentor-mentee relationship intervention targeted towards the at-risk population of the RYJC. The age group for this intervention will be middle schoolers, those between the ages of 11 and 13. The intervention will rely on instructors knowledgeable in the sport of Judo and coaching/mentorship techniques to train a group of students as 'mentors'. These students will be near the age and slightly above the skill level of the mentee group. Through regular one-on-one meetings between the mentor and mentee, a deep relationship can be formed. The role of the

mentor in this relationship will be to continue building the mentee's Judo technical/philosophical knowledge and skills, self-regulation skills, and reinforce prosocial behavior. Human development does not occur in a vacuum, and a sense of belonging and community is important for healthy growth to occur (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2019; Melinder et al., 2010; Murry et al., 2015; Rhodes et al. 2006). Through this intervention, more positive developmental factors can be placed on the promotive side of the 'developmental seesaw'. This can have a cascade effect throughout the rest of the individual's life, including better performance in school, greater self-esteem and sense of control of one's life, and more prosocial behaviors leading to higher-quality relationships between the mentee and their family/friends (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Fisher, 2014; Kessler et al, 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Sroufe, 2005).

The Opportunity

Children from low-income, low-socioeconomic backgrounds face many challenges. Parents may work or be stressed due to financial concerns, leading to poor quality relationships in early childhood (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Melinder et al., 2010). Poor relationships between caregivers and their children can further lead to negative attributes developing in the child, including insecurity, anxiety, poor academic performance, and poor self-regulation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Copeland et al., 2009; Fisher, 2014; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Rowe, 2018; Sroufe, 2005). Often these issues are related to development inputs that are not being met, such as language or sensitive responsiveness (Rowe, 2018). Parents from low-SES backgrounds typically spend less time speaking and have less quality conversations with their children, leading to poorer literacy outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Rowe, 2018). Dr. Meredith Rowe reinforces the risk of poor literacy being a cyclical issue

in particular, stating “parents who have more formal schooling rely more on verbal interaction with their young children than parents with less schooling” (p. 124). Furthermore, children raised in such environments may be at-risk of not having quality ‘serve-and-return’ interactions (Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Rowe, 2018). Again, this can become cyclical, where the child then is raised with poor serve-and-return relationships being internalized and the norm (Fisher, 2014; Melinder et al., 2010).

The long-term impact of such risk-factors and their subsequent impacts is crucial to address. Despite the connected environment of the 21st century, children report high rates of loneliness, with depression and anxiety often being comorbid with reports (Ebesutani et al, 2015). While the need for belonging is observed across all lines of humanity, it takes different shapes in meaning from culture to culture, context to context (Easterbrook and Vignoles, 2013). Group dynamics change depending on the individuals, but can be very beneficial overall if implemented properly. For example, home-grown programs and home visitation programs - like the nurse-family practitioner program - can have huge positive impacts for families (Ghate, 2018; Olds, 2010). These programs design opportunities for parents to have extra support from knowledgeable professionals, an ‘extended’ family designed to support the family with knowledge, accountability, and resources that the immediate family may not have. One of the most well-known forms of developing self-efficacy relates to our proximal others; those who we make contact with frequently and are most similar to us (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

Within this context, the Riverside Youth Judo Club (RYJC) has an opportunity to implement an intervention that can support it’s neediest children, between the ages of 11 and 13. These years are second only to the years between birth and the age of 3 in known importance for

healthy brain development (Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010). Research has shown that community and a sense of belonging and purpose drives positive development, and is a throughline of humanity (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2019; Melinder et al., 2010; Murry et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2006). The RYJC was born nearly a decade ago, and is a non-profit geared towards serving all children in the Riverside city area academically, mentally, and socially. This is done through the teaching and coaching of Judo as a vehicle to teach social-emotional skills and build relationships with families. For our first several years, all of the children served were either at-risk or special needs; today the RYJC boasts over 300 members, with over half being either special needs or at-risk.

Beyond coaching, the club builds a community of support for it's families. All the instructors are volunteers, with several being either teachers or police officers. The RYJC heavily emphasizes the importance of academic achievement, effort, and growth, and creates bridges that lead to tutoring and academic success including connecting students to local college graduates/professors for academic help. RYJC offers guaranteed scholarships to all of it's graduating high school seniors, and funds any academic camps students of any age may get into. With a majority of the children having developmental delays, the RYJC has roughly a dozen BCBA's and behavioral therapists who work with kids both in the dojo and their homes for free. The end result is the creation of a supportive environment where families - many of whom are low-SES, immigrants, and/or have special need children - feel supported and as part of a community.

Utilizing this already established model, I am seeking to target our children in grades 7-9, years of profound growth and importance due to biological factors like puberty, and societal factors like entry into high school. This age group is susceptible to a multitude of factors that can

either play a promotive or detrimental role, including peer group, cascading effects due to academic performance and self-esteem, and parental/environmental factors (Bandura, 1994; Fisher, 2014; Masten & Wright, 2009; Sroufe, 2005). Negative influences in one or more of these layers affecting an individual's development can lead to poor social outcomes, poor self-regulation, and can cascade into poor long-term academic and life achievement, as well as increased aggressive behavior (Copeland et al., 2009; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2010; Sroufe, 2005). The intervention will be geared at creating a mentorship program between our target level at-risk children and our high-achieving children, as well as former program members and our instructors/volunteers. Through a mentorship program geared at quality peer-to-peer relationships, I hope to increase positive proximal processes for children in our target group; to increase their self-mastery efficacy and the resources near them (especially the access to mentors that are like them, such as are program alum), and to bring about permanent change outputs. These outputs will be measured through their school achievement, family reporting of behavior, and the child's reporting of their self-esteem and self-efficacy/ability to control their actions and environment.

Literature Review

The Challenges of Poverty, Loneliness, and Mental Illness

Loneliness and Mental Health

In their research Dr. Ebesutani et al. (2015) discuss the role that loneliness plays in youth when a tripartite model of anxiety and depression is made. He states that, "Research has shown that childhood anxiety is often associated with interpersonal difficulties, including social skills deficits and poor peer relations" (p. 224). These interpersonal challenges lead to children internalizing a negative self-image, harboring a negative attribution bias, and socially

withdrawing, contributing to a sense of loneliness which further perpetuates the cycle (Ebustani et al., 2015, pp. 224 - 225). Ebustani et al. cites a range of issues that derives from depression and anxiety in adolescents, including functional impairment, impaired emotional functioning, and poor coping mechanisms that lead to poorer outcomes later in life like an increased risk of substance abuse later in life. These are compounded by the fact that these disorders usually end up being internalized by the time they are often discovered or addressed, making the damage long-lasting (Kessler et al., 2005; Ebesutani et al., 2015). Many causes can lead to the development of depression or anxiety, including genetic predispositions and trauma, and research has indicated that untreated anxiety disorders usually precedes depressive disorders (Ebesutani et al., 2015; Shanahan et al., 2009). Oftentimes anxiety and depression are comorbid (Ebesutani et al., 2015; Shanahan et al., 2009).

Due to the effect of internalizing a negative self-image and the development of a hostile attribution bias, social withdrawal can occur leading to loneliness (Ebesutani et al., 2015); Social skills deficits lead to an inability to form meaningful relationships and negative peer responses, which in turn perpetuates what Ebsutani et al. refers to as “a cycle of social withdrawal and social avoidance” (p. 225). Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) paints a picture of how damaging this can be to an individual's development. Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ research suggests a complex, layered model of development; while an individual may be in the center of their model, their development is affected by both those in close proximity and the broader society (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The child is supported and interacts with systems and individuals around him or her, including proximal processes in the microsystem (immediate family and peers, school) as well as at the mesosystem (parent’s stressors at work brought home and affecting the individual).

Bronfenbrenner's research drives home the importance of quality relationships in a child's development; in particular, Bronfenbrenner highlighted the relationship between a child and their mother, stating "across the board, maternal responsiveness had the general result of decreasing or buffering against environmental differences in developmental outcome" (p. 800). The importance of quality, supportive relationships is further illustrated in David Olds' *The Nurse-Family Partnership: From Trials to Practice*, where Olds states that:

Even if children are exposed to negative peers, nurse-visited children are less likely to be susceptible to those negative influences because they will have stronger relationships with their parents, which will have helped them develop a stronger moral core. (Olds, 2010, p. 54)

Here Olds demonstrates the importance of supportive relationships and proximal processes, and the strength of their role as promotive factors in childhood development. Such supportive relationships will be vital to this intervention and the population the RYJC serves.

Mentorship, Relationships, and Community as Effective Interventions

Reflecting on the damaging nature of depression, anxiety, and its subsequent byproduct in the form of loneliness, a key question is raised: Can an intervention be implemented to increase promotive factors for children, particularly those at-risk? Many interventions have been attempted with the aim of staving off negative risk factors in an individual's development. One such intervention was detailed in *A Pilot Digital Intervention Targeting Loneliness in Youth Mental Health* by Michelle Lim, Thomas Rodebaugh, et al. Lim et al. implemented an app designed to connect peers with one another; some peers had mental illnesses and some did not. Through the app, positive psychology and other social-emotional skills were discussed and presented to help users focus on building and strengthening quality relationships with a few of

their peers, rather than superficial, weak relationships with many (Lim et al., 2019). Over the course of six weeks, those with social anxiety disorder (SAD) reported 50% satisfaction of their close relationships, and those without SAD reported a 70% satisfaction rating (Lim et al., 2019). Neither groups reported the app being the sole cause of creating new relationships or increasing their social confidence, but rather building their social-emotional skills and knowledge to help them in their peer-to-peer interactions and self-regulation (Lim et al., 2019).

Mentorship also plays a role in building promotive factors for humans and offsetting risk factors. Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) discuss the importance of belonging in their research, *What Does it Mean to Belong? Interpersonal Bonds and Intragroup Similarities as Predictors of Felt Belonging in Different Types of Groups*. Regarding group belonging Easterbrook and Vignoles state that “people feel most ‘included’ within larger groups” (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013, p. 455). When individuals are in homogenous groups, they feel as if they meld and blend in, losing their individuality (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). Group definitions are important in making individuals feel as if they truly belong versus them just being passive members. When groups are “social categories” they are defined as “very large and inclusive such as race or religion, or more exclusive, such as [name of university] psychology student” (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013, p. 457), and where you don’t need to know each member individually but just have to belong to that category; on the opposite end are “social networks”, defined as “anything from formal organisations to informal friendship groups but you should know all or most of the members of the group personally” (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013, p. 457). For respondents in Easterbrook and Vignoles’ research, categorical membership was important until interpersonal relationships came into play. At this point, it matters less the categorical connection, and more the quality and quantity of interactions (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). This result, combined

with Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) research on the proximal other and the importance of quality, consistent relationships, paves a path for us to investigate when implementing interventions to developing individuals who are marginalized, facing risk factors such as poverty and mental health, and may be at-risk of not thriving to their utmost ability (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Copeland et al., 2009; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Olds, 2010; Rowe, 2018; Sroufe, 2005).

Judo and the Power of Mentorship in Martial Arts

Judo is a martial art from Japan with a rich history and a massive contemporary following. Much research has been done on the attributes that martial arts like Judo teach and their beneficial impacts, including mindfulness, awareness, self-regulation (Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020). In their research, Rassovsky et al. (2019) discovered that martial arts practice and play can lead to an increase in Oxytocin (OT) (Rassovsky et al., 2019). For kids that practiced martial arts, OT production was increased during practice (p. 2). OT is key in “regulating mammalian social behaviors” (p. 1), and “has been shown to support the formation of attachment bonds” (p. 1). Rivera et al. (2020) wrote in *Effects of an 8-Week Judo Program on Behaviors in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Mixed-Methods Approach* about the power of Judo in supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The results of their research was that 78% of parents noted better quality social interactions in their children with ASD, 100% noted better interactions for their children and their peers, and 78% reported their child having better self-esteem (Rivera et al., 2020), among a host of other benefits. While Judo tournaments and practice focuses on the individual focusing on their growth, practices are not solitary affairs; a Judoka's performance, skill, and technical knowledge will only be as good as their instructors and their teammates.

Effective, rigorous, and constant practice is necessary for growth and improvement. The sport lends itself naturally to building strong one-on-one relationships with fellow teammates, clear and effective communication, and a strong presence of mind (Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020).

Within the sport of Judo, mentorship can be a powerful tool for success. In *A Model for the Influence of Mentoring Relationships on Youth Development*, Jean Rhodes et al. (2006) discusses the importance of mentorship in promoting positive youth development. Among the many benefits, Rhodes et al. note that mentorships “promote the social and emotional well-being” (p. 694) of youth by providing opportunities to de-stress, connect with their peers and reflect on their actions, and assist with their emotional self-regulation (Rhodes et al., 2006). Furthermore, in his seminal work *Self-Efficacy*, Albert Bandura (1994) notes that the second most impactful way of increasing self-efficacy is “through the vicarious experiences provided by social models” (Bandura, 1994, p. 3), similar to Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) “proximal other”. Through people similar to us, we can draw strength and further our achievements. This is the model and research on which many programs are built, from Alcoholics Anonymous to Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

Keeping this in mind, my proposal is to utilize the framework established by the RYJC to introduce a mentorship program. The mentors will be trained by our volunteers, including myself, to develop a clear definition of the terms self-efficacy and self-regulation. Through educating the volunteer instructors and youth mentors, we can maximize the proximal relationship the latter play to assist some of the children who face the greatest risk factors to their development. While we cannot take away their depression, we can make them feel like they belong, make them feel like we care, and more important is show them both of the former

through our actions. We can play the role of the proximal other for children who have none that are positive, and help them increase their self-regulation. The goal of this is to increase their prosocial behavior and create a positive/promotive cascade effect that, in combination with the promotive effects inherent in the sport of judo, inherent in the positive relationships the child may have at the RYJC or in their life, and hopefully inherent in the child's school environment, may lead to the child thriving. Furthermore, through better self-regulation and increased self-efficacy, I hope that this intervention will at the very least shift the fulcrum towards a promotive factor, so that if the developing child experiences risk factors at a time where they no longer have a reliable mentee or the RYJC to support them, they are still equipped and prepared to thrive and succeed.

The theory underlying the theory of change is based on several theoretical concepts that have shown strong promise in research, practice, and anecdotally from personal experience. Community is a key part of the human experience; our peers, family, and 'proximal others' help shape us into the beings that we are as much our experiences and life circumstances do (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Lim et al., 2019; Melinder et al., 2010; Murry et al., 2015; Rhodes et al, 2006). The quality of our relationships plays a strong role in our development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Melinder et al., 2010). Research has demonstrated a connection between the quality of early childhood relationships and later life outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010). Despite where children may begin, research also reinforces the concept of change overtime, particularly when specific levers are targeted and promotive factors are added to the seesaw of an individual's development or the individuals fulcrum is shifted towards the promotive side (Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010). Creating a community where every

individual feels valued and welcome, particularly when they may be missing that need in their family or peer life, can serve as a promotive factor (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Lim et al., 2019; Murry et al., 2015). For children facing behavioral and/or academic challenges at school, this environment can help support their self-esteem and self-regulatory skills (Faro et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019). Children facing risks with feelings of little to no agency in their environment/choices may often choose to act out, leading to a vicious cycle where teachers may retaliate, further alienating the student (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2019). This may lead to negative long-term cascades, including the child withdrawing from school work, acting out further, or even behaving in an aggressive manner (Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010; Rowe, 2018).

Theory of Change

Background and Assumptions

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought to light many longstanding and known issues in American society. Ever-widening gaps in earned income, socio-economic inequality, education, and justice are further expanded by a virus that has impacted minorities and our most vulnerable populations substantially. This is highly evident in the population that the RYJC serves. Beyond coaching Judo, the RYJC has provided services and a safe, caring community space for some of our city's most neediest and at-risk children. In the near-decade of its existence, the RYJC has raised and given nearly \$100,000 in scholarships and donations to local charities. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the RYJC has made regular donations of daily necessities and groceries, and even held free Judo classes over Zoom to support children. Many of the children we serve are in poverty, homeless, special needs, or some combination of all and more

risk factors. These risk factors serve to impede proper development, stymying executive functioning and self-regulatory skills (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Fisher, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Olds, 2014), decreasing prosocial behavior and positive peer development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Olds, 2014), and increasing the risk of poor life outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Masten & Wright, 2009; Olds, 2014; Sroufe, 2005).

The Riverside Youth Judo Club (RYJC) has been an established organization in the city of Riverside for nearly a decade. As part of the Riverside Police Department's Police Activities League, the non-profit organization was originally geared towards providing an after-school sports program for the city's at-risk youth. Today the RYJC sports the largest roster of Judo players in the United States, and has distinct honors attached to its name, including being the first organization to represent the United States at the World Special Needs Judo Tournament in the Netherlands in 2018. The RYJC extends beyond the sport of Judo; the organization's end goal is to support some of the most vulnerable members of the city and surrounding area of Riverside. Throughout the years, careful partnership between the instructors and the families we serve has seen many of the children that participate in our program graduate high school and move on to either serving in the military or attending a community college/four-year university. Beyond coaching, the club has and continues to offer tutoring in conjunction with former program members and professors at the University of California, Riverside, behavioral and mental health support for children and their families, and food, toy, and necessity drives to support the many low-income families that participate. The RYJC's end goal is to support positive development of our city's youth, and to foster a community-service oriented mindset geared towards success, service, and giving back.

For my theory of change, I seek to improve promotive factors by introducing a mentorship program for the middle school aged children within the existing framework of the Riverside Youth Judo Club (RYJC). The end goal is to increase the mentee's self-efficacy and long-term outlook, the mentor's knowledge of self-regulation, and mentorship skills, and both the mentors and parents' understanding of effective, promotive serve-and-return. Human development is a team effort, with quality human relationships and serve-and-return being constant factors in supporting prosocial and promotive long-term growth (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Olds, 2010). To support the children and families we serve, children in need of extra support (or those that would like to be involved) will have the opportunity to work with children of slightly higher age/skill level and from a variety of backgrounds in a mentor-mentee relationships. These mentors will be supported by Judo instructors, Shodans (1st Degree Blackbelts, as certified by the U.S. Judo governing body) or above. Instructors will have extensive knowledge of both the technical and philosophical aspects of Judo. For the latter, a sense of presence, mindfulness, and a growth mindset environment is key in promoting the mentee's self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Faro et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2019).

Resources, Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes

Through Judo practices, mentors will engage mentees on a one-to-one basis at least once a week. Both the mentor and mentee must attend at least 80% of all practices in a given month for intervention consistency and success. The one-to-one meetings will be predominately unstructured within the overall structured environment of RYJC practices. For example, as the instructors teach a skill (e.g. a throw) to all students, the students will then break off into small groups with their partners to practice the throw. In these moments, the mentor and mentee will

engage in practice, with the ability to speak to each other naturally, be it about the throw or what they plan to do for the weekend. The natural formation of these conversations is key for an authentic relationship to develop. The goal of these interactions will initially be to build working and quality relationships. During practice, the one-on-one meets will revolve around Judo practice, but conversations about activities outside of practice between the mentor-mentee will be tolerated. While such conversations may not be on the topic of Judo, it serves to allow natural relationship development (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2019; Rhodes et al., 2006). This is based on a wholesome commitment to utilizing serve-and-return interactions (Melinder et al., 2010). The mentor throughout practice will seek to provide feedback through reflection questioning practices taught by the instructors. The goal of such feedback is to help the mentee develop as a practitioner of Judo, reflect on their behavior/performance, and develop a mindset geared towards consistent growth with the allowance of mistakes as a part of the process (Faro et al., 2020; Rivera et al., 2020). The opportunity to belong to an activity that extends beyond the self can be an enticing motivator for individuals, and the emphasis on growth through resilience builds a lifelong skill that is transferable to many domains (Bandura, 1994; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Rhodes et al., 2006).

The mentor will be close in age and skill-set to the mentee to increase the self-efficacy of the mentee, as a mentor too far removed may create a sense of ‘difference’, be it in age, skill-level, or other key characteristic (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). In building a sense of community and authentic commitment to the well-being of all, we can bring in students who may feel disenfranchised. These relationships can also lead to the mentee not only buying into the sport of Judo further, but also the norms and

self-regulatory skills that Judo provides through its approach as a martial art influenced by Buddhist ideology (Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020). Meditation, presence of mind, the noticing of one's thoughts and actions are all key components of Judo, elements that go hand-in-hand with the technical aspects of throws, pins, chokes, and submissions (Faro et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019). These strategies can utilize self-regulatory skills that the mentee can take advantage of outside of the Dojo, be it at home with family or at school with teachers and peers (Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020).

The RYJC mentorship program intervention seeks to target individuals, and in doing so influences their microsystem, their peers' mesosystem, and the exosystem of the community within the community the organization and mentee operates (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The microsystem is influenced each and every time the child interacts with their mentors, teammates, and the Judo instructors. At the mesosystem, the child's interactions at practice and engagement in the social-emotional skills leads to an improved interaction with their peers in school and at home. The focus of the RYJC intervention towards kindness, respect, and community will contribute to the targeted mentee playing a positive role for other peers and individuals in the mentee's environment (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Bandura, 1996; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). At the exosystem, the RYJC's core value of community service can open the door for mentees to influence the development of others.

The instructors in this model serve as the knowledge distributors, working closely with the mentors. Instructors are highly trained and experienced, and themselves will receive instruction on social emotional skills, self-regulation and executive function theory and implications, and best mentorship practices (Bandura, 1994; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013;

Rhodes et al., 2006). All of this knowledge will be modeled, discussed, and disseminated to all club members, scaffolded appropriately for different age groups. Handouts will also be made for parents with quick tips, and outside resources will be referred to for more information. Mentors will be targeted specifically for specialized training sessions where in-depth discussions will occur on meditative practices, self-regulation practices, relationship/mentorship building and technical Judo skills.

By supporting the child academically through tutoring and positive affirmations, instilling a sense of mindfulness and presence of mind in their actions and thoughts, and increasing their mastery of the difficult sport that is Judo, a child may increase their concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Every week there will be ceremonies to emphasize academic achievement (as reported by parents/children), as well as promotions for anyone who has earned a new rank. These public ceremonies will always emphasize the importance of a growth-mindset, the power of perseverance, and the importance of consistent effort (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Bandura, 1994; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Fisher, 2014). Through consistent attendance, practice, and participation in the program for at a time period of no less than a year, it is possible for the child to begin improving their behavior at school, at home, and in a variety of other situations.

Microsteps and Assumptions

Judo is a sport that transcends all boundaries, be they gender, cultural, or economic. The RYJC offers low-cost or subsidized (free) Judo courtesy of the band of volunteers that donate time and financial resources, as well as the donations from the community and through its role as a Police Activities League (PAL). Every dollar is utilized to support our members and their families, be it through supporting their academic endeavours (e.g. scholarships for our high

school/college-bound students) or to support families personal needs (e.g. the purchasing of school supplies, food deliveries). For students to succeed in this intervention, several micro-steps must be met. Despite the framework provided at low or no cost, both the mentors and mentees must be vested enough in the sport to continually attend practice. Gaps in attendance can lead to deficits in technically, philosophical, and theoretical knowledge. This relies on two potentially problematic assumptions: the first is that the parent will be able to continuously transport their child to practice. As a majority of our families are at-risk, this may not always be a realistic possibility for all. The second is that children may hold interest throughout the years. As children age and grow, their interests, time commitments, and life circumstances change. While over half of our children stay for one or more years, turnover can lead to half-formed or weak fully-formed relationships to fall apart, collapsing the basis upon which the intervention is designed.

Human development is not a solitary experience, and strong relationships can be great promotive factors in an individual's development. The Riverside Youth Judo Club serves a number of at-risk children who have a number of risk factors within their bio-ecological framework. Utilizing the already existing framework, the mentorship intervention can seek to maximize the usage of close relationships to add another layer of growth and promotive factors for children at-risk, leading to long-term positive cascades. These cascades include reduced behavioral issues (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010) which can lead to more prosocial behavior and positive social interaction with peers (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010, Rhodes et al., 2006), and positive long-term academic and life outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Fisher, 2014; Olds, 2010).

See Appendix for a link to the full theory of change, as well as instructions to use it.

Accountability

Judo lends itself naturally to constant improvement for practitioners and Judo organizations as a whole. The sport relies on meditative approaches and self-awareness to promote constant growth and improvement. The sport's philosophy builds upon two key precepts: Seiryoku-Zenyo, which translate directly to maximum efficient use of energy; and Jita-Kyoei, meaning mutual prosperity for self and others. For practitioners of Judo, the ability to exert the most amount of force with the least amount of effort is paramount; competitors must utilize their opponents movements against themselves. If a competitor resists or hesitates, they open themselves up to be thrown or countered. This requires immense self-regulation, self-control, and awareness. The sport is purely based upon constant reflection, progression, and improvement for all involved.

Aside from relying on the sport itself to promote accountability, data will be used to measure student self-esteem, awareness, and the students progress reports will be used to measure academic success and growth. Participants of the program will be asked to take a quarterly survey every three months. The survey will ask participants questions pertaining to their feelings of belonging, self-confidence, and sense of self-worth as an individual and within the team as a whole. They will also be asked to rank their satisfaction with their personal growth and technical growth in Judo. The data gathered each quarter will be utilized to review the programs efficiency and open discussion for improvement. The main measure for success will be reported improvements in two or more of the following categories: belonging, self-confidence, sense of self-worth, academic performance (school progress reports/report cards). See Appendix for an example of the survey.

Final Points

Poverty, mental illness, and poor self-regulation skills are critical risk factors that can lead to poor academic and life outcomes, poor peer and familial relationships, and aggressive and/or antisocial behavior, and low self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Copeland et al., 2009; Kessler et al., 2005; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Olds, 2010; Rowe, 2018; Sroufe, 2005). Interventions that focus on creating a community, caring, and welcoming environment can add promotive factors to at-risk children between the ages of 11-13 years of age, leading to positive long-term impacts including greater life satisfaction, prosocial behavior, greater academic and professional success, and stronger relationships (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ebusutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2019; Masten & Wright, 2009; Melinder et al., 2010; Olds, 2010; Rowe, 2018; Sroufe, 2005). The sport of Judo and the RYJC has the current framework and environment within which a mentorship based intervention can further an individual's success and increase their promotive factors (Bandura, 1994; Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Faro et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2019; Rassovsky et al., 2019; Rivera et al., 2020). By establishing a one-on-one mentorship program within structured practice time, deep and response relationships can be created. This allows mentors trained on the importance of social-emotional and mentorship skills to support the growth of mentees who may have few promotive factors to support healthy development (Bandura, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Easterbrook & Vignoles 2013; Fisher, 2014; Murry et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2006). Such a program is low-cost for all stakeholders, adaptable and easy to change overtime, and can lead to improved life outcomes for all children, particularly the most at-risk (Bailey & Jones, 2019; Ebesutani et al., 2015; Fisher, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2019; Olds 2010).

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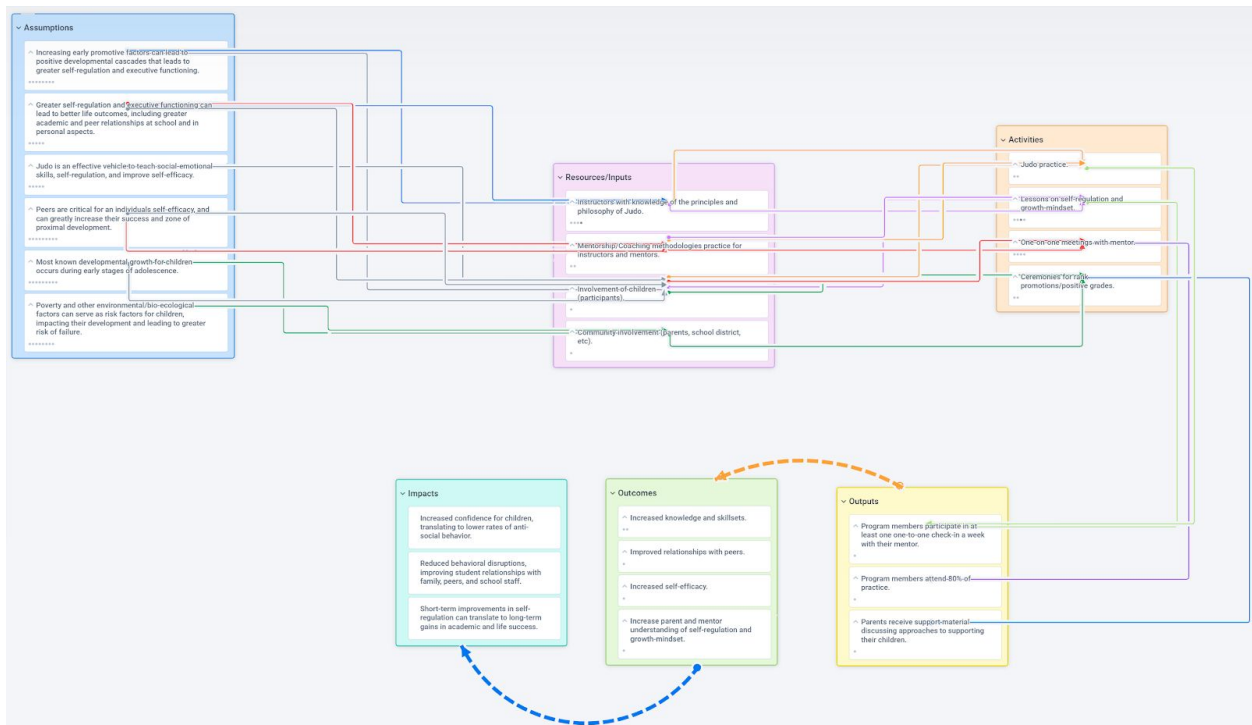
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Appendix

Theory of Change Broad Overview (For the In-Depth Theory of Change, See Below)



[Click here for a view-only of the complete Theory of Change -](https://beta.plectica.com/maps/6VPC3K7SA)

<https://beta.plectica.com/maps/6VPC3K7SA>

- There are little arrows in each section. If you click those, you can find further reasoning behind theory/assumptions, including cited research and anecdotal experience.

[Sample Survey - Please Click Here](#)

- The survey is two pages long and can be viewed without answering questions and/or being logged in. The photo at the header was from the first all-female Judo tournament held in Riverside, CA, by the Riverside Youth Judo Club. Now an annual tradition, the yearly charity tournament has raised over \$60,000 towards supporting local breast and ovarian cancer foundations in the city of Riverside. I can be seen in the bottom left.