

Introduction

Travis Mash grew up deep in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Western North Carolina and overcame the odds to achieve his dreams. Travis has been strength training for over 21 years and he continues to work with athletes on their speed, strength, and overall athletic performance. Travis is a current world champion in powerlifting and has held the all-time pound-for-pound world record. He was also an Olympic hopeful in weightlifting and was recruited for the U.S. men's bobsled team.

As a world champion and the only USA Weightlifting Senior International Coach in NC, Travis is able to share his champion mentality with his athletes. He is also passionate about sharing the champion mindset with at-risk youth in the greater Winston-Salem area. He has a heart to help guide at-risk youth so they can achieve their goals and dreams. Mentorship is key and this program is Travis's way to help influence and guide youth.

Definition of At-Risk Youth

There are many definitions for youth at-risk but we believe that **any child** that grows up in this world is at risk in some way. Our nation's children and adolescents are under tremendous stress in today's fast-paced society. Longitudinal studies, such as, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have found that "childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity" (<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>, April 21, 2016).

At-risk youth are exposed to violence, substance abuse, and other negative influences at a very young age. Youth can be at risk despite their ethnicity, gender, age or family background. Parents can raise their children in a supportive and loving environment; however, their teens may still become caught up in dangerous lifestyles and choices due to societal and peer pressure.

There are many signs that indicate that trouble is brewing. Below are some major indicators that your youth may be at risk. If you recognize any of these indicators in your child, please seek help from professionals. This is not an exhaustive list and any intervention or diagnosis should be done by a licensed professional counselor or psychologist.

School	Failing at school, skipping school, sleeping frequently in class, getting into fights and in conflict with authority, being bullied
Family Life	Arguing with parents and siblings, running away from home
The Law	Getting caught shoplifting, smoking, glue sniffing, rioting, gang-related activities, vandalizing public property
Unusual Behavior	Extreme violence, lose their cool easily, self-mutilation, cutting, spends lots of time alone, extreme mood swings, loss of appetite or binge eating,

	sexually active
Self Belief	Low in confidence, unmotivated, gives up easily, has a 'I don't care' attitude

Purpose:

To assist targeted youth, identified as **at-risk**, through the Mash Elite Weightlifting fitness/Olympic lifting/tutoring/mentoring program.

We have designed our program to emphasize the three pillars of positive psychology: positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. We aim to provide positive experiences for the youth in the program through sport and mentorship. We aim to provide positive role models so youth can see positive individual traits in action and also through participation in the program the youth will have opportunities to learn about positive traits and how they manifest. We also strive to be a positive institution for the youth in our program as they observe us in action.

Another key area in assisting at-risk youth is the Protective Factors Framework. Our program focuses on two of these protective factors: Social Connections and Social and Emotional Competence of Children.

According to the Protective Factors Framework, "social connections include positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, n.d.). This is the very foundation of our mentoring program. Our coaches, volunteers, and mentors will build these social connections with the youth in our program.

According to the Protective Factors Framework (Center for the Study of Social Policy), Social and emotional competence of children includes interactions that help youth develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and manage their emotions and establish and maintain relationships (Center for the Study of Social Policy, n.d.). Our program provides youth a safe place to interact, enjoy sport and engage in positive interaction through both sport and our smack sessions.

Mission:

To increase the resiliency in adolescents predisposed to risk factors and serve as a protective factor through health, wellness, self-esteem, and discipline within a sport with the goal of promoting positive outcomes for a productive life.

Coaches/Mentors/Volunteers

Any person in the program that will or may come into contact with the youths in the program must complete a background check to include sex offender status. Per GlobalHR research recommendations, employees and volunteers in this program will

submit to a background check every 36 months to ensure that the youth participants are kept safe.

Coaches must agree to and follow the outlines and procedures set forth by the Organization.

Specific books and videos will be identified for coaches to read and review; some may be mandatory and others will be suggestions that should be heeded when time avails.

Coaches must have an active CPR certification and maintain a SafeSport certification

Program Director will be responsible for ensuring all background checks, CPR certifications, and SafeSport certifications. are current.

Locating At-Risk Youth for the Program:

The program will find youth through the local area schools, churches, existing community organizations like Big Brother/Big Sister, and other contacts may be made through law enforcement agencies in an effort to find those in need of help. Once the word is out about the program some participants may be brought through word of mouth by their families and through participants in the program trying to help others they see.

Selection Process

A current overview:

- The program receives a referral - and an application is submitted
- A selection team will review the applications based on criteria that is not solely based on financial need, but rather based on individual risk factors present
- The program is considering a rolling selection process that will enable youth participants to function as peer mentors to the new youth joining the program. This will further enhance self-esteem and confidence.
- Minimum age for selection to the program is 11.
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The Program

Character traits (like integrity, honesty, and perseverance) along with life skills (like goal setting, balancing check book) will be established and participants will be held to these traits by their fellow youth members and coaches. Once a month, the participants in the program will peer review each other on their adherence to the character traits and the results will be shared with each youth and reviewed to determine strengths and areas for improvement.

Along with fitness, focus will be placed on positive mindset development. Mindset is formed from both one's environment and one's genetic predisposition, and environment is the predominant factor influencing individual mindset.

A person forms their paradigm, their view of reality, based on surroundings and genetics like I explained. A paradigm shift occurs over time as a person/athlete starts to learn that

their initial paradigm doesn't have to be their reality. For instance, a negative paradigm is a false reality that one makes up in their mind based on circumstances. Through positive comments and experiences an athlete can slowly shift their paradigm into a positive view of reality.

An example would be an athlete not realizing that she could make an International Team until the coach started talking about it. Slowly over time, she starts to buy in, and then she's battling for that position. For an at risk child, they might believe that college isn't possible based on comments from their parent or teachers. Over time, we teach these youth that college is a reality for anyone that wants to make good grades. Then we teach them study skills and good habits. Over time their paradigm is shifted.

Music played in the gym will be 'clean' music; it does not have to be Christian music (it can be), but filters must be turned on for Pandora, I-tunes, Spotify, etc. at all times.

Initially, those attending will start with general fitness training in order to create overall physical fitness in the youth, to build muscle, and to create coordination, agility, and increase cardio-pulmonary function. Physical fitness has been shown to serve as a protective factor against stress, depression, social pressure, as well as to build resiliency in our at-risk population.

As the youth participants progress, they will be introduced to the sport of Olympic weightlifting and a new arena- competition. This will expose them to a new experience and build self-worth and desire through healthy competition against others in their age and weight class. They will have the possibility of representing their country in an international competition. These competitions include youth, teens, and junior age groups.

While the fitness side is being conducted, coaches are to teach and reinforce the character traits, ethics, morals, and life skills.. The purpose is to provide positive influences in the participant's lives.

The youth will be tutored in their school work if needed, to create positive school-community relationships that will further serve as protective factors, and all report cards will be checked. Coaches will connect with the youth's counselor as needed to ascertain their needs and progression in school.

Coaches will interact and talk with the youth often, teaching them how to make positive life decisions while guiding them through the outcomes and consequences of their choices. Some examples of life skills include managing a bank account, applying for college/trade school, determining their passion, goal setting, parenting, etc.

An Example of a Class

* Class arrival- youth change, if needed, into workout clothes

- * Greeting by the coach, small talk to liven up the group. The coach will be watching to see if any of the youth are not acting appropriately.
- * Warm-up
- * Strength Training
- * Cardio work
- * Cool down
- * Smack session - this is where the group gets together and talks. The coach will lead and guide this conversation around a trait or pre-selected topic to allow the conversation to bring to life a lesson that the youth can apply in their life. Also, the coach will encourage laughter and fun.
- * Tutoring- depending on the night- this will be the final activity of the day.

NOTE: Once the program director starts, we will solidify logistics such as days of the week, times, and transportation.

NOTE: Possibility of adding a food program once details and Health Department concerns are addressed.

Suspension from the Program

Youth fighting, either at school, on the street, or in the gym, are subject to either in or out of house suspension from the program.

Arrested youth will be suspended and dealt with according to their crime.

Youth lying to coaches will be handled with an in-house suspension

Any act committed by a youth in the program may be reviewed and proper action will be taken; to include in or out of house suspension.

Youth are expected to take school seriously. If a youth is not turning in their homework and actively participating in their education, or not maintaining grades, coaches and mentors will intervene to discuss the appropriate action, up to and including suspension.

Rules such as these and others need to be in place and enforced to show that there are consequences to actions and choices. However, the need is for the youth to be in this program, so any suspension will be short and every effort will be made to reinstate the youth in the program.

Conclusion

Whether the youth grow up to be Olympic weightlifters or not, they will leave the program having obtained the ability to function as positive, productive, caring and thoughtful human beings. No matter what these youth choose to do in life- further education or enter the workforce - they will have the tools to mentally and physically support themselves.