ADULT PERSPECTIVES OF KALEIDOSCOPE CONNECT: A SOCIAL EMOTIONAL PROGRAM AIMED AT PROMOTING RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTH

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ADULT PERSPECTIVES OF KALEIDOSCOPE CONNECT: A SOCIAL EMOTIONAL
PROGRAM AIMED AT PROMOTING RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTH

By

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ABSTRACT

**Purpose.** The current study explored the perspectives of adults who participate in Kaleidoscope Connect, and specifically, to understand how effective adults perceive the program in its attempt to promote resilience, school safety, and the psychological well-being of youth.

**Background.** Youth who encounter stressful life circumstances or experience trauma often experience negative life outcomes, such as lower academic achievement, mental illness, and perpetrating violence (Liu, Reed & Girard, 2016). Research, however, has demonstrated that some youth who have these experiences have more positive outcomes, including psychological health, strong academic achievement, and financial stability (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Resilience is a dynamic process described as a person’s ability to overcome adverse conditions and thrive despite those obstacles (Ungar & Leibenberg, 2011). Researchers have been interested in identifying the mechanisms that underlie the promotion of resilience among young people who face challenging life circumstances (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). The presence of strong adult-youth bonds has been identified as a powerful contributor to the promotion and maintenance of resilience (Criss, Smith, Morris, Liu & Hubbard, 2017). One program that aims to strengthen the bond between youth and adults in their community is Kaleidoscope Connect, which, among other states and countries, has been implemented in rural communities of Alaska and Montana; two states with a high prevalence of mental health concerns (CDC, 2017).

**Methods.** Adult perspectives were explored through survey responses, from which descriptive and frequency data were provided. Then, focus groups were conducted and qualitatively analyzed, identifying prominent and consistent themes endorsed by adult participants in the program.

**Results.** Results showed that participants believed that Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum (moderately to significantly) increases closeness between adults and youth, reduces suicidality among youth, promotes positive school climate and enhances community safety. Furthermore, participants overwhelming reported that the program is feasible in its implementation, primarily due to its flexibility of dissemination and relationships with Brightways Learning. Participants also discussed ways in which all of these domains may be enhanced.

**Conclusions.** These data may enhance the implementation of Kaleidoscope Connect and contribute to its successful and effective dissemination across rural communities in Alaska, Montana, and other similar areas.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Many youth are born and raised in a home with less than ideal family dynamics and conditions. Issues faced by youth today include poverty, violence, substance abuse among family members or themselves, bullying at school, and the modeling of poor communication skills (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). These troublesome obstacles facing youth today can pose various threats to their expected intellectual, social, and emotional development, which can in turn negatively impact their trajectory toward fulfilling their full potential as adults (Masten, 2011). Among the most important factors that promote favorable development is the feeling of safety. In fact, it is a fundamental human need for youth to feel safe, and to therefore thrive in the context of their family, community, and at school (Maslow, 1943). The feeling of safety not only manifests within the home environment, but in the school environment as well. There is extensive research that shows that many students do not feel physically or emotionally safe in their community or school (Astor & Van Acker, 2010). The feeling of compromised emotional and physical safety is influenced by interpersonal and contextual variables that define the climate of a community and school (Astor & Van Acker, 2010).

Researchers have been investigating ways in which we can increase the resilience of youth who are raised in less-than-ideal circumstances (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). A theme that reliably emerges from resilience research is the connection of youth to strong adult role models (Riley & Cochran, 1987). The evidence for the benefit of strong youth-adult relationships is powerful, from being protective against violence in dangerous neighborhoods (Criss, Smith, Morris, Liu & Hubbard, 2017), to acting as a protective factor for adolescent suicide (Rojas &
Coker, 2015), to curbing the manifestation of mental health problems among adolescents in rural communities (Rew et al., 2012). The research also suggests some common themes for effective promotion of resilience among urban versus rural youth (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Resilience is a complex topic; an idea that is reflected in the numerous definitions that exist throughout the literature. One study describes resilience as a “process” and not a “trait,” stating that “[resilience is] the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways” (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011, p. 127). As an outcome measure, resilience can be predictive of many positive outcomes. The characteristic of resilience has been shown to enhance numerous life outcomes, including better mental health (Jain & Cohen, 2013), academic achievement (Powers, Hagans & Linn, 2017), physical health (Werner & Smith, 1979), and even contribute to the emerging science of epigenetics (Sapienza & Masten, 2011). Because resilience has been tied to many important outcomes for youth, it is a sensible outcome measure for research to explore, and particularly through the lens of actionable interventions that can promote this powerful trait. When youth are connected to positive adult role-models in their community, they are more resilient (Masten & Monn, 2015). When youth are facing adversity, they are more resilient when they have strong adult bonds, and they are more likely to benefit from the long list of positive outcomes related to resilience (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick & Sawyer, 2003).

Though the research is powerful in demonstrating the importance and benefit of adult ties to the youth within their communities, there is very little research exploring how these relationships are fostered. What is of greater interest to researchers and practitioners alike should
be an examination of the effective methods of promoting this connection, and therefore capitalizing on the touted benefits of these strong bonds. One way in which social efforts are translated into practice is through social-emotional intervention programs, which are most often implemented within the school context. To this end, of great benefit to the field would be an empirical examination of the social and emotional intervention programs that aim to promote connection between youth and strong adults within their community. Some research has examined this question, such as exploring outcomes of a child-adult relationship enhancement program in primary care (Schilling et al., 2016); the FRIENDS program, which is a family-based cognitive behavioral treatment for anxious children and their parents (Shortt, Barrett & Fox (2010); and a study that explored the value of youth mentors who entered the home and school context to regularly interact with the youth they serve (Lakind, Atkins & Eddy, 2015). Multiple studies have captured the importance of organized efforts to promote adult-youth bonds with a focus upon the youth’s perspectives. Often, however, the perspective of the adults who participate in these efforts is often touched upon lightly or omitted entirely. Adult perspectives of how accessible these programs are, how feasible participation is, barriers to participation, and the perceived effects of the programs upon the communities in which the participants are living are invaluable. These perspectives can inform how efforts are organized, funded, offered and implemented, all while delivering the best possible programs for youth and adults.

One social-emotional intervention program is aiming to promote resilience among youth by fostering stronger ties between youth and adults. The program, which is called Kaleidoscope Connect, offers a series of lessons that integrate psychoeducation about strong youth-adult ties with experiential activities devoted to fostering these relationships in real communities. The program has been implemented in both a classroom context and an intensive, weekend-long
format in numerous rural communities across the United States with promising results. This program is typically implemented with adults who hold various roles within the youth’s lives, including parents, teachers, and community members. This program would benefit from an evaluation of adults’ perspectives who participate in the intervention, including their perceived effectiveness of the program to enhance youth’s lives and the feasibility of program participation. Evaluation of their perspectives can help to inform the successful implementation of this intervention program and others that have a similar aim: to promote resilience and feelings of safety among youth by strengthening their bonds with strong, stable adults within their community. Additionally, Kaleidoscope Connect has been implemented in primarily rural states that, in some cases, show a high number of risk-taking behaviors among youth that are associated with negative health outcomes. Among these states is that of Alaska, which shows a stark prevalence of mental health concerns that has grown over the past decade (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Likewise, Montana, which is a predominantly rural state, shows disturbingly higher rates of mental health concerns among youth. For instance, 21% of Montana adolescents endorsed suicidal thoughts, attempts or incurred a suicide-related injury in 2017, in comparison to an average of 17% across the United States (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). In Alaska, that rate jumps to 23% for suicidal ideation or attempts for adolescents in 2017 (US DHHS, 2018). The implementation of Kaleidoscope Connect in Alaska and Montana, and an evaluation of how “buy-in” among the adult community effects the intervention’s successful dissemination, is of benefit to the health of Alaska and Montana, as well as other states with similar rural communities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the current study is to explore the adult perspectives of participants in a social-emotional intervention program called Kaleidoscope Connect. The questions addressed in this study are to evaluate whether adults see improvement in the youth participant’s resiliency, as well as whether adults feel the program effectively promotes feelings of safety among youth. Finally, feasibility and accessibility of participation in the program is evaluated among adults. Overall, this program is only effective when both adults and youth perceive it as effective and enriching. The results of the study can help support the implementation of this program and similar programs that aim to promote connectedness between youth and adults within their community. The population of this study is representative of rural communities, which describes an important group of youth who are showing particularly high rates of mental health concerns and suicidality (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). These rates are particularly high in the state of Alaska and Montana, which have among the highest rates of suicide in the country among adolescents (CDC, 2016). In 2017, there were 35.1 deaths per 100,000 adolescents who died by suicide in the state of Alaska (CDC, 2018). In the same year, there were 22.5 deaths per 100,000 adolescents who died by suicide in Montana (CDC, 2018). The average number per 100,000 across the United States is 8.9, highlighting the importance of this issue for these states (CDC, 2018).

Resilience and Protective Factors

The literature exploring resilience has numerous working definitions of the concept, including descriptions ranging from resilience as a “trait” to resilience as a “process.” One commonly cited definition of resilience is from the work of Ann Masten (2011), which defines
resilience as the ability to achieve a positive outcome in life despite challenging or threatening circumstances. More specifically, Masten (2011) defines resilience as “the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability or development” (p. 494). The concept of resilience comes from the idea that the more risk factors present in a youth’s life, the more likely the youth is to suffer negative life outcomes. These negative outcomes include mental health issues, self-harm behaviors, incarceration, homelessness, physical health problems, financial instability, and poor social relationships (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick & Sawyer, 2003). When viewed as trajectory of development that promotes healthy coping skills, resilience is the factor that defies the anticipation of negative life outcomes due to a youth’s harsh life circumstances (Liu, Reed & Girard, 2016). Therefore, resilience is crucial for those individuals who are born into circumstances that are unstable, unpredictable, and volatile.

A pivotal study exploring the concept of resilience is the Kauai Longitudinal Study of Children and Adolescents (Werner, 1992). An interdisciplinary team, including psychologists, pediatricians, and public health workers, set out to examine the development of babies born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai in 1955. This study was a robust analysis of the developmental journeys of these children, following a cohort of 698 from birth until 32 years old to determine their capacity for resilience and the hurdles they had to overcome to find success in life. The participants were of Hawaiian, Japanese or Philipino descent, and one third of all participants were considered “high risk,” since they were not only born into poverty (approximately 55% of the cohort, or 201 individuals), but they were also born into other high-risk circumstances, such as disintegrating marriages, heavy substance abuse among their caretakers, or community discord (Werner, 1992). For those children who were categorized as “high risk,” about two-thirds
of them encountered, as defined by the study, at least four or more risk factors by the time they were two years old and later developed significant difficulties. These significant difficulties included serious learning or behavioral problems by 10 years of age, delinquency records, mental health problems, and teenage pregnancy. Despite these difficulties, 35.8% of these “high-risk” children (approximately 72 individuals) went on to have productive and fulfilled lives. Those individuals became competent and responsible young adults, who were well loved, productive in their work, and cultivated strong bonds with others in their communities (Werner, 1992). Werner and colleagues further examined what made it possible for this group to grow into stable and reliable adults who contributed positively to their society. Interestingly, Werner noted that all but two individuals in this group went on to accomplish educational and vocational goals that were equal to or exceeded those goals of their low-risk counterparts (Werner, 1992). Commonalities among members of this group included temperamental characteristics of the individual, which aided in that person’s ability to respond positively to their caretakers, including parents, teachers, friends, spouses or romantic partners. The characteristics also included skills and values that led to efficient use of their innate and developed abilities, including reasonable goals for education or vocation and household responsibilities, as well as the belief that they could accomplish something important in the future. Those resilient individuals also tended to come from households with parents whose parenting style reflected competence and encouraged self-esteem development in their children. This variable was also associated with the mother’s education level, employment, and presence of rules and structure within the home. The homes of the resilient children also had parents or other adults who nurtured trust and supported their children in accomplishing their goals. Finally, the resilient group had encountered opportunities at various crossroads in their lives, including work related opportunities during the transition from high
school to the work place, or from single life to marriage and parenthood. Among the most powerful predictors of success was a phenomenon thought of as a “second chance,” which focused on youth with significant difficulties who later received adult education in their 20s, which included attending local junior colleges or educational and vocational skills acquired during military training. This study was paramount in launching the empirical interest in resiliency as a process that was dynamic and interacted with multiple aspects of a young person’s life that led to positive life outcomes.

Research demonstrates that multiple factors in a young person’s life can be associated with poor life outcomes. Children who are exposed to extreme adversity, including unpredictable events that negatively impact their lives, traumatic events, death(s) of a loved one, bullying, violence, and substance abuse (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012) are at increased risk for these outcomes. Common outcomes for those youth are numerous, including disrupted educational attainment (Jennings et al., 2016), poverty and un-or under-employment (Abbot-Chapman, 2001), psychopathology (Eisman et al., 2015), and violence (Jan & Cohen, 2013). What is of primary interest to researchers of resilience is those youth who are in fact exposed to numerous risk factors and, despite their tribulations, are able to succeed in multiple domains in their life. Resilient youth are thought to be hardy, which is defined in the literature as the “the ability composed of three components (commitment, control, challenge) that prepares a person to deal with stressful life events” (Kobasa et al., 1982, p. 168). Kobasa and colleagues (1982) described commitment as being demonstrated by an individual who is committed to their own enjoyable or meaningful activities, such as sports, work, academics, religious practices, or hobbies. Control is described as the belief that a person can control the outcomes of their life despite their current circumstances, or perhaps in some cases, influence their own life circumstances by actively
making choices (Kobasa et al., 1982). Challenge is defined as a person’s interpretation regarding stressful events, and specifically, their interpretation of those events as stimulating in contrast to threatening. Research has associated this component of resilience with drug use among youth (Abdollahi, Talib, Yaacob & Ismail, 2015). Hardiness is thought to be a key component of resilience (Abdollahi, Talib, Yaacob & Ismail, 2015), and is predictive of overcoming adversity among those youths who encounter various life challenges.

Characteristics that serve as protective factors thought to promote resilience have been identified throughout the resilience literature. Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) describe protective factors in depth, and their meta-analysis explores how these protective factors influence the role of resilience in a youth’s life. Resilience is thought to be promoted by protective factors, which helps to explain why some youth who face adversity thrive and others succumb to negative outcomes associated with harsh life circumstances. Protective factors influence responses to troubling events and avoid the potentially negative impact on an individual. Protective factors are part of a dynamic process and should be considered in the context of one’s life. In this way, resilience, with respect to its promoting factors, is a process, as it can be changing and adapting to shifting life circumstances. Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009) conceptualize resilience to be most robust when its protective factors are strengthened at all interactive levels of one’s socio-ecological context, which would include one’s family and community characteristics, as well as one’s individual characteristics.

A youth’s individual characteristics have a strong influence upon their trait resilience (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Numerous longitudinal studies have revealed that personality factors influence the degree to which a child is resilient and can help decrease the impact of negative risk factors. When considering a person’s resilience, it is important to consider the
interaction that the individual has with their environment and how this relationship may shape their response to stress in later life. Murphy and Moriatry (1976) conducted research that explored the temperamental characteristics of youth that are associated with positive responses from family members and strangers. This research examined the resilience of preschool children, with those who were particularly resilient having a marked autonomy and strong social connections. The study also highlighted other key characteristics associated with resilience, including a close bond with a caregiver during the first year of life, sociability combined with a strong sense of independence, an optimistic view of experiences in life even in the midst of emotional or physical pain, and an active engagement in helpfulness.

Alvord and Grados (2005) also discuss contributing characteristics to trait resilience. In a study that examined the promotion of resilience among young children, characteristics that were identified to effectively promote resilience included a child’s intelligence, connections with others, and their attachments from early life. Other research has also highlighted the role of healthy coping skills, which are thought to be health-promoting response to demands interpreted by a person as being taxing or exceeding available resources in the promotion of resilience (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1993). In one study, the coping skills of a caregiving mother were found to mediate the relationship between maternal depression and child behavioral problems. Moreover, when a mother’s coping skills were adaptive and healthy, this buffered financial strain, which in turn was shown to reduce a child’s risk for poor cognitive development and problems with externalizing stress and other uncomfortable private experiences (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1993). Basic temperament as a result of interacting with caregivers is another protective factor of resilience, which lends itself to positive caregiver-infant relationships and supports the idea of a strong social bond promoting resilient factors in a child’s personality.
Some research has revealed that a person’s gender identity, and more specifically, if the individual was born and continues to identify as a female, is associated with an increased tendency to be resilient. This finding was illustrated by females having a significantly lower risk of juvenile court petitions in comparison to males (Benzies & Mychasik, 2009) and their internal motivation to overcome obstacles in contributing to an individual’s resilience. With respect to gender identity, one study found that girls are more socially attractive than their boy counterparts, as boys tend to socially associate themselves with more aggressive peers (Criss et al., 2017).

Health practices among youth are also associated with increased resilience. One study revealed that a family’s resilience characteristics are bolstered when each of its members are physically and mentally healthy (Brennan, Le Brocque & Hammen, 2003). The maintenance of physical health, which includes adequate nutrition, stable and healthy stress management practices, and regular exercise are also found to be associated with an increase in trait resilience among children (Alvord & Grados, 2005). More generally, those families that had a low rate of chronic or hereditary illness were more likely to have children that demonstrated common characteristics of resilience (Blum, McNeely & Nonnemaker, 2002).

Resilience is an important predictor of many desirable life outcomes (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012; Werner, 1992). An important consideration is whether resilience manifests in the same way across communities that are ethnographically, geographically, and socioeconomically diverse. Alaska Native youth is a particular group that deserves attention with regard to this consideration, as Alaska Native youth may be enduring more adversity in comparison to their non-native counterparts (Wexler et al., 2013). Alaska Native communities have undergone a substantial shift in lifestyle and values over the past three decades, as social, economic, and
political changes have infiltrated remarkably rural communities (Wexler et al., 2013). In many small villages, the inhabitants have gone from a primarily nomadic, subsistence lifestyle of family-based fishing and hunting for food to a small village-settlement lifestyle that boast a market commodity structure. Children attend missionary schools that are mandatory, whereas in the past they have been educated in other ways (Wexler et al., 2013). Importantly, Alaska Native youth are exposed to the most protective factors when they endorse strong connections to their community (Henry et al., 2012). One study showed that communal mastery among Native Alaskan Youth was particularly protective, which is described as a “sense that you can solve your own problems by working together with other people in your life. It includes a confidence that others from your family and community are there to help you, and that working with them is the best way to solve your problems” (Henry et al., 2012, p. 478). As suggested by this study, an Alaska Native youth endorses similar protective factors related to resilience as other youth living in both urban and rural areas.

When surveying the literature on the topic of resilience, it is clear that many protective factors exist that are associated with increased resilience among youth and adolescents. As the above studies highlight, there are a plethora of potential sources of resilience. For those youth who many not have inherent access to these protective factors, it is necessary from an empirical and clinical perspective, to consider what can be done to promote trait and process resilience among youth. An important question is “how can we promote resilience in youth who may otherwise not have access to these protective factors, namely, through intervention?”

**Promotion of Resilience among Youth**

Identification of efficacious interventions that can foster and support the development of resilience among at-risk youth is of the upmost importance to researchers and clinicians in the
public health services fields. One study examined the impact of the Seattle Social Development project (Kim, Gilman, Hill & Hawkins, 2016) through a longitudinal study including 808 participants in the Seattle Public School District. These participants were followed from 5th grade through later adolescence (10 through 18 years of age). The results of this study revealed that when participants had more protective factors in early and middle adolescence, their odds for being involved or committing violent acts in later adolescence were significantly lower than those without any protective factors. These protective factors were identified as those present within the family context (e.g., rewards, positive relationships, and clear expectations), school context (e.g., school engagement), and community (e.g., safe neighborhoods). The results of this study echoed others that identified the importance of these various characteristics to improve the degree to which youth are found to be resilient. What can be done, and effectively, to increase the odds that youth will have more protective factors or be more resilient?

One study highlights the importance of parent perceptions of their children and its impact upon their trait resilience, and particularly, among Hispanic children. Research has demonstrated that children who are reared in urban areas are often at risk for being exposed to violence and substance use in their communities (Rew, Gardy & Spoden, 2012). For those Hispanic children living in rural areas, limited research has examined the associated protective and risk factors that compromise resilience. An investigation of 603 children enrolled in the fifth grade, 54% of whom were Hispanic or Latino, evaluated the resilience of these children at the time of the study and again five years later when they were in high school. The outcomes of the study included competence and self-worth, and were predicted by the youth’s gender, ethnicity, their mother’s education level, their stress level, their temperament, and their ability to perform at their academic grade level. Importantly, the strongest predictor of competence and self-worth was the
parent’s perceptions of a child’s temperament. In other words, the positive nature of the
caregiver-child relationship, and more specifically, the parent’s perception of their children’s
temperament as being easy and positive, increased the child’s feelings of competence and self-
efficacy (Rew, Gardy & Spoden, 2012). Though this study is not an intervention with the goal of
increasing resilience, it does suggest the potential role of psychoeducation regarding parental
perceptions. This information can help influence the parent-child relationship, which can have a
profound impact on a child’s life, and particularly among the Hispanic and Latino population,
according to the results of this analysis.

An important question regarding the promotion of resilience among at-risk populations is
whether interventions can be effective in relieving the burden or ameliorating risk factors that
decrease one’s chance of overcoming adversity. One specific risk factor identified in the
literature that impacts a youth’s ability to overcome adversity is the use of substances, and
specifically alcohol, as a coping mechanism (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). One population that is
particularly at risk is the Alaskan Native youth, who have been shown to suffer
disproportionately from depression and suicidality in comparison to other youth and minority
groups, and even more troubling, have been shown to abuse alcohol and other substances at
alarming rates (Mohatt, Fok, Henry, People Awakening Team & Allen, 2014). Researchers
designed a program to prevent suicide and alcohol abuse among rural Yup’ik Alaska Native
youth in two remote communities of Alaska. The study, which examined the feasibility of an
intervention program to decrease the burden of these risk factors, explored whether the
intervention could be implemented in one of the many rural Alaska Native communities and
whether the intervention was proficient in generating measurable effects. The study showed a
medium dose response, where dose was defined as the number of intervention activities attended
and the amount of time spent participating in those activities. Results also revealed a moderate effect size \( (d = .30-.50) \), which describes the meaningful growth in protective factors, including a marked increase in individual characteristics related to resilience and the ability or desire to abstain from using alcohol. An interesting finding showed that those who began the intervention program with higher levels of protection (protective factors) were more likely to benefit from and be influenced by the presence of or by the pressure provided by their peers (Mohatt, Fok, Henry, People Awakening Team & Allen, 2014). This study highlighted, for those Alaska Native youth who participated, that they were most likely to benefit from interventions when they targeted individual characteristics by having that level of intervention activities, in comparison to community or family related activities. This finding may begin to explain a particular unique characteristic of the Native Youth communities; that they may need to feel personally connected to an intervention to experience and benefit from its effects.

Another study focused upon Alaska Native youth found that relationships were both the most common stressor and the most critical resource that contributed to the development of their resilience (Wexler et al., 2013). Researchers conducted interviews with 11 to 14 year-old youth that explored their history and everyday lives. The results suggested that a youth’s resilience strategies centered upon their relationships with others, and namely, with adults in their life that they could look to for guidance (Wexler et al., 2013). Of value to this population was a sense of “relatedness,” which was described by participants as relationships that were nurturing and that took on family-like qualities. These relationships facilitated a sense of competency and self-worth for youth, and helped them build their resilience by having those connections upon which they could rely in times of struggle.
Masten and Monn (2015) describe a picture of resilience that includes children and their families as representing an integrated system. In recent research, the concept of resilience has no longer been explored as a specific and static trait, but has instead been seen as a dynamic, multi-tiered, and process-oriented concept that is based within the relationships between individuals. Importantly, this new conceptualization of resilience integrates a Family Systems Theory approach, as well as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and biological indicators that influence an individual’s sensitivity to positive or negative experiences (Masten & Monn, 2015). The relevance of this conceptualization is that targeting individuals for the promotion of resilience no longer makes sense, as the process is not considered to occur “in a vacuum.” Instead, it has become clear that targeting protective factors of individuals to aid them in bolstering their resilience is just as important as educating and influencing their environment to support these goals. When communities are participating as a whole in intervention efforts, the effects of the intervention can be clearly seen and defined. For instance, Community-based participatory research (CBPR) with American Indian and Alaska Native communities has informed the needs of resilience interventions, with the results of these projects highlighting that dynamic programs including options for personalization are the most effective. In fact, some research shows that having a strict formula for interventions across rural communities in particular hinders not only the program’s effectiveness, but also its ability to be adequately compared to other empirical projects of the same endeavor. This information contributes to the understanding that although common factors and approaches can be identified that promote resilience among youth, the ways in which these interventions are implemented should be tailored to a particular setting to increase their efficacy. Furthermore, these interventions should be personalized. When it comes to
relationships, and the fact that the research demonstrates that adult-youth relationships can help support the resilience of at-risk youth, it is difficult to imagine a more personalized approach.

**Adult Perspectives on Promotion of Resilience and Program Participation**

Many of the resilience studies described above involve a youth’s perceptions of how certain efforts support or contribute to his or her endorsed resilience and ability to overcome adversity. Despite adult-youth relationships being a strong contributing factor to resilience, which will be later explored in this paper, what is often missing from these explorations of interventions is adult perspectives. It is of value to understand these perspectives regarding the feasibility, as well as how they perceive resilience programs in their communities to be important and effective. If the participation of adults in the programs and, more generally, in the lives of youth, makes a meaningful difference in the youth’s resilience, then adult views should arguably be considered to be as important as the views of youth.

Limited research has been explored in this area. One study examined the nature and extent to which parental involvement impacted their child’s participation in an organized program. The organized programs chosen for this particular study had different aims in children’s lives, including arts, leadership, science, and technology (Kang et al., 2017). The programs collectively served primarily Latino/a adolescents, but they also included Caucasian and African American youth. The study was longitudinal in nature, as it followed the youths, their caregivers, and the program leaders across a single program cycle, and it involved multiple forms of data collection for each treatment phase. These data sources include interviews, Likert scale questionnaires, and standardized measures related to feasibility of each study (Kang et al., 2017). Parents and caregivers were asked to provide their experiences and standpoints on the process of adolescents joining the respective programs. Interestingly, this study also explored the
opinions of adolescents and their ideas regarding their parent or caregiver participating alongside them in a community program. Research has highlighted the idea that for adolescents, making their own choices and decisions is a highly attractive idea that grows with time. As such, programs that include both adolescents and their caregivers should also balance parental and child goals, so the youth establish both intrinsic motivation and autonomy in their social activities (Vandell et al., 2015). Parents and caregivers were found to play four key roles in the lives of the children at the time they joined a community program; effective emotional supporters, managers, informants, and instrumental supporters.

Emotional support was defined as the adult providing encouragement and advice to the adolescent when they join the program, as well as providing affirmations. Moreover, adults can support adolescents in finding purpose, meaning, and benefit from program participation (Lang et al., 2017). The manager role described the parent’s ability to guide the adolescent in selecting the desirable program that is right for them (Lang et al., 2017). Adolescents must have first identified how their participation fits with a goal that they value, whether it be preparation for college, developing a certain skill for an occupation, or investing in a new hobby. The role of manager also supports a youth’s need to develop schedules or other responsibilities, so that youth can effectively balance participation in the new program with current school and work-related responsibilities. The informant role described parents who provided information to their children regarding program details (e.g., existence of a program or description of included activities).

Lastly, some parents filled the role of an instrumental supporter by providing logistical supports, including transportation to program activities, helping schedule initial meetings, providing funds to participate, helping the youth sign up for the programs, and aiding in acquiring equipment. Many parents in the study fulfilled at least two roles (34%), and most parents (92.5%) held a role
in the adolescent’s joining of the program process (Lang et al., 2017). Overall, the study highlighted that the role of emotional supporter was associated with the most meaningful increases in a youth’s interest and participation in the program. In other words, the more that a parent or caregiver supported the youth in their experience participating in a community program, the more interested and invested that youth became in the endeavor, and presumably, the more they benefited from the program.

This research highlights the ways in which an adult’s investment can greatly influence the degree to which their child or a youth in their life engages with, and therefore benefits from, community-based programs. With respect to intervention programs aimed at increasing resilience among at-risk youth, this effect may be pronounced. Programs that are currently implemented to increase resilience among youth are typically strengthened by an adult caregiver’s participation (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). More research could be useful in highlighting the role of a caregiver’s assessment of the value of these programs, and how the parent’s level of investment impacts the investment of the participating youth in their life. Of all public programs, the youth’s experience in school has the greatest impact on their life and long-term outcomes. An adult caregiver’s perception of the importance of school also affects the level of investment that youth show in their educational and academic goals (Astor & Van Acker, 2010).

**Perceptions of Community and School Safety**

Feeling safe in a social, emotional, intellectual and physical way is considered to be a fundamental human need that allows human beings to fulfill their potential (Maslow, 1943). A compelling body of literature suggests that for a child to learn and retain knowledge and skills in school, they must feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe in their learning environment
(Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & D’Alessandro, 2013). It is of immense interest to school practitioners, community workers, and mental health providers to promote this reality not only in school settings, but throughout the communities in which children live. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) published a position statement on this subject that states that “NASP vigorously supports and promotes efforts that create safe, secure, and peaceful schools free of the destructive influence of violence in all of its forms. NASP further maintains that schools must implement purposeful, coordinated strategies that increase levels of safety and security that simultaneously promote student wellness and resilience” (NASP position statement, 2015). The current state of feelings of safety of children in educational settings is troubling and suggests that more can be done to bolster children’s feelings of interconnectedness to their communities and schools.

In fact, there is a great deal of research that shows that many students do not feel physically and emotionally safe in schools, which is thought to result from flawed interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school’s climate (Astor & Van Acker, 2010). A defining feature and contributing factor to the perception of a safe learning environment is the climate at a given school, which can be defined and described in various ways. One comprehensive definition describes school climate as the “patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational strategies” (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & D’Alessandro, 2013, p. 358). Furthermore, the climate provides a sustainable, positive environment that fosters the development of youth and promotes the learning that is necessary for a youth to have a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. The climate of a school that is healthy and promotes feelings of safety, among other important contributors to a successful academic environment,
will include norms, values, and expectations that support its members to feel physically, emotionally, and socially supported and safe. The school climate goes beyond the relationships between its students and includes all members of the school community, including administrators, teachers, and staff (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & D’Alessandro, 2013). Other defining features of a healthy school climate include people who feel respected by others, are engaged with one another in professional and social endeavors, and who work to cultivate a shared school dream. Learning is promoted as an endeavor to be savored and enjoyed; one that is fulfilling, beneficial and satisfying in its own right. The healthy school climate has members who care about the outcomes of learning and the environment in which they learn, and know how to support each other through the process of educating young people to be positive and respectful leaders.

Because not all communities are the same, considering the ways in which perceptions of safety and connectedness impact members of communities that are diverse and different from one another is important. The difference between rural and urban communities, for example, may lead members of the public to believe that the needs of a connected community are heterogeneous, particularly because in urban settings, more adults are available with whom youth can connect and bond. Researchers set out to examine the associations between subjective well-being and perceptions of community trust and safety among children in rural and urban areas. These youth were recruited as part of the Swedish Cross National study of health behavior in school-aged children conducted by the World Health Organization (Eriksson, Hockwalder & Sellstrom, 2011). The study examined the perspectives of 3852 children from 11 to 15 years of age who were living in various urban or rural communities. Interestingly, the results indicated that those youth who resided in urban areas reported, on average, perceptions of community trust
and safety that were lower than those living in rural areas. Furthermore, the study highlighted that in less densely populated areas, feelings of being a part of a “close-knit” community were more pronounced in comparison to their urban counterparts. This perception is thought to be the result of more acquaintance-type relationships within the sparsely populated areas, which may promote a greater sense of trust and security among the community and its members. The study suggests that an increase in familiarity and social cohesion strongly predicted the perception among youth that their community was safe and promoted social connection, which in turn enhanced their attitude toward their neighborhoods (Eriksson, Hockwalder & Sellstrom, 2011).

Similar to other studies, the perception of safety and security had a strong impact upon the children’s subjective well-being. In fact, children who endorsed feelings of insecurity and being unsafe were nearly twice as likely to report low subjective well-being. The association of poor perceptions of community safety and low subjective well-being were stronger among the urban population, suggesting that this association may be more pronounced among those living in those neighborhoods. Furthermore, the results suggest that subjective well-being may have less of an impact on those living in rural areas when they do not perceive their community as interconnected when compared to urban participants, though the finding for both groups was significant.

A youth’s behavior may be related to the sense of connection they feel to their community, and may understandably influence all youth’s feelings of safety (Alvord & Grados, 2005). A meaningful measure that summarizes the behaviors of youth in a particular state is the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1990), which was developed by the CDC in 1990 and is designed to monitor the prevalence of health risk behaviors in which all ninth through twelfth graders engage. The behaviors that
youth are asked to endorse are associated with illness, disease, and death among young people and adults. The YRBSS was first implemented in Alaska in 1995 and Alaska currently disseminates this information each year the survey takes place. The most recent data available for Alaska youth (2019) presents some troubling trends: 44% of respondents reported that they feel alone in their life, less than half of respondents agreed that they feel they matter to people in their community (47.8%) and 38.1% reported feeling sad or hopeless during the past year. With regard to suicide, 25.3% of respondents have seriously considered suicide, 21.6% have made a suicide plan, and 19.7% have made at least one suicide attempt during the past year (CDC, 2019). These data suggest that a great deal of youth in Alaska are struggling to manage feelings of loneliness, depression, and suicidal ideation. This cohort of young people could benefit from a targeted intervention that aims to promote resilience among youth born into and dealing with adverse circumstances. The YRBSS results in Montana suggest a similar picture: 22% of youth endorsed being bullied on school property during the last 12 months, 37% endorsed feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks, and 20% made a plan to attempt suicide in the past 12 months (CDC, 2019).

The degree to which youth perceive their community, whether that is in respect to their school community or the one in which they live, affects their well-being and ability to be successful in life. To fully appreciate the effect of perceptions of school climate, which includes safety and interconnectedness, it is important to understand the effect of poor perceptions of that climate on youth and how these particular aspects of functioning can be considered in the development of interventions to promote a more positive school climate.
Effects of School Climate Perceptions upon Youth Outcomes

Research has demonstrated that the school climate has a profound effect upon a student’s mental and physical health, and that this can have long-term effects on their later life outcomes (Thapa, Cohen, Guffy & D’Alessandro, 2013). The effects of an unfavorable school climate are extensive and can in turn impact many areas of a student’s functioning. One study showed that school climate was positively correlated with a student’s self-esteem (Hoge, Smit & Hanson, 1990). Researchers estimated the impact of the school climate on this variable by utilizing longitudinal data of sixth and seventh grade students, where each student’s self-esteem was measured in the fall and spring of each year using their global (total self-esteem), academic (overall scholastic), and discipline specific (math or science) confidence in their abilities. Among all of the variables explored, including student ratings on teachers, the teacher’s evaluations of the student’s work and social habits, and participation during the year of academic activities, school climate statistically significantly predicted a student’s self-esteem (Hoge, Smit & Hanson, 1990). These findings suggest that despite specific relationships with teachers and peers, and beyond performance in specific disciplines of academic pursuits, it was the collective climate of the school that impacted a student’s faith and belief in oneself to succeed in scholastic goals.

School climate appears to be associated with the emergence of problematic behavioral and emotional problems during the middle school years (Kuperminic, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001). One study conducted a longitudinal, cross-sectional analysis to examine the relationships between perceived school climate and multiple psychological and behavioral variables using the Depressive Experiences for Adolescents (DEQA), which considers an adolescent’s interpersonal concerns, self-criticism, and self-efficacy (Kuperminic, Leadbetter & Blatt, 2001). The tool utilized to assess perceptions of school climate (the School Climate Scale; Haynes, Emmons &
Commer, 1993) included student’s perceptions of the social climate of their school, which considered achievement motivation, fairness, order and discipline, parent involvement, sharing of resources, student interpersonal relationships, and student-teacher relationships. The study highlighted the critical impact the school environment has upon a child’s interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning. Youth who were self-critical but who viewed their school as a place that was fair, had equal opportunities for learning, and positive relationships, were not any more likely than their peers to develop internalizing or externalizing problems. In contrast, youth who were self-critical and perceived their school’s climate to be negative went on to develop disruptive and, in some cases, extreme, internalizing and externalizing problems, such as vulnerability to depression, inappropriate expressions of anger, and social maladjustment (Kuperminic, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001).

A positive perception of school climate can also profoundly affect outcomes related to a youth’s academic, social, and emotional functioning. Schools who promote a supportive emotional social climate were related to positive outcomes in behavioral and emotional problems among high school students who were enrolled in that school for at least two years (Kasen, Jonhson & Cohen, 1990). Among the positive outcomes were a decrease in alcohol use, increased academic focus, a sense of autonomy, and an increase in positive social interactions. Similar research depicts schools as a part of a framework that provides a developmental environment, influencing a student’s coping skills for the rest of his or her life. One study hypothesized that a school’s social climate could be modified to either help or disable a student’s development of adaptive coping skills and that this directional relationship could influence academic success (Ruus et al., 2007). The results of this study showed that the school climate, and more specifically, the variable related to the school’s value system and attitudes that teachers
held toward their students, had a profound impact on students’ self-perceptions. Namely, students who viewed their school’s value system favorably and reported positive relationships with teachers and other school professionals went on to endorse an optimistic acceptance of their life, psychological health, overall well-being, and success in their academic endeavors (Ruus et al., 2007).

The research outcomes demonstrating the effect of school climate on a youth’s psychological health and other variables is robust. Researchers are also exploring these effects across diverse communities, including rural and urban school districts and various cultures. For youth attending urban schools and who come from low-wage income families, school connectedness may be particularly important. Nasir, Jones, and Mclaughlin (2011) examined the attitudes and behavioral tendencies of an urban high school by asking how are affective and behavioral dimensions of school connection related to one another for African American students in a high-poverty urban high school? High school students were interviewed, observed, and completed surveys to capture their interpersonal connection, as well as their perceived relationship with their school institution, and how this related to their academic achievements and academic identities. Results showed that students who endorsed feelings of interconnection, both with respect to their connectedness to their school and social encounters (including adults and peers) had higher grades and graduation rates. Those youth who felt connected to their school, but did not feel interpersonally engaged, did not fare quite as well as their comprehensively connected counterparts. Youth who endorsed low connection in both institutional and interpersonal arenas were more likely to show undesirable outcomes, including being less likely to graduate, more likely to suffer from mental health problems, and more likely to struggle with substance abuse (Nasir, Jones & Mclaughlin, 2011). This study highlights the
diverse ways that connectedness to one’s academic and social community can impact the individual’s achievements and motivation to succeed, and perhaps most strikingly, this effect is found to be consistent among a population that has high poverty and is comprised of mostly minority students. These results are meaningful in understanding the comprehensive picture of how school climate and one’s interconnectedness with their learning community can be generalized to multiple types of communities in both urban and rural contexts, and among differing minority and majority ethnic and racial groups.

Though these results are encouraging, it is also important to consider the generalizability of these concepts across other countries, and not just within socioeconomically diverse communities with the United States. One analysis explored the differences in the lives and well-being of 8 to 14-year-olds across four countries—Argentina, Romania, South Africa and Korea—when their perceptions of life were considered in the context of their rural or urban living circumstances (Rees, Tonon, Mikkelsen & De Le Vega, 2017). For the purpose of this examination, a rural community was defined as one with a population of 50,000 people. This study looked at material deprivation, family context, family relationships, friendships, school experiences, safety, facilities provided by local government, and overall subjective well-being. Interestingly, there was diversity in terms of the meaningful role of a rural versus urban upbringing that appeared to be country dependent. The authors of the study suggested that in general, there is some convincing evidence that subjective well-being may be associated with a rural-living lifestyle rather than an urban-living lifestyle; however, this effect appears to be dependent upon the culture to which the children in question ascribe (Rees, Tonon, Mikkelsen & De Le Vega, 2017). The overall conclusion of this study is although feelings of safety and trust of a community were stronger among rural children, the generalizability of this finding is
questionable. More research is needed to truly understand the variability of rural-urban
differences with respect to feelings of safety and overall well-being. As with any research, it is
important to take these findings into consideration with the greater landscape of safety
perceptions among children, and consider this information when making greater assumptions
about the benefits of interconnected communities. Nonetheless, the overall research in this area
demonstrates that overall perceptions of school and community safety, in addition to youth
interpretations of their school climate, is positive, which can have lasting effects on their life and
across multiple domains of functioning.

The Power of Adult and Youth Relationships

The discussion of youth feeling connected to their communities in which they live and,
more specifically, to the communities in which they attend school, cannot be complete without
considering the role that adults play in these relationships and perspectives. In fact, there is
considerable research that shows that the positive perceptions of school climate and the
connectedness that youth experience could be driven by a youth’s bonds to caring and supportive
adults in those communities. For instance, research shows that youth experience a reduced fear in
their school community when they endorse having at least one close relationship with an adult at
school (Akiba, 2010). More specifically, students feel a sense of belonging when they have a
positive relationship with a teacher. Furthermore, the closer of a bond they reported having with
their teachers at school, the lower level of fear, on average, they endorsed regarding the safety of
their school (Akiba, 2008). Other research shows that positive student-teacher relationships have
been shown to be related to less depression and anxiety symptoms, as well as lower levels of
social dysfunction that underlies the presence of anxiety (Sarkova et al., 2014). Furthermore,
strong student-teacher relationships have been associated with a youth’s increased self-esteem
and less self-doubt (Sarkova et al., 2014). Other important outcomes related to strong adult relationships in a youth’s life include a reduction in suicide attempts (Pisani et al., 2013), psychopathology (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), violence, and bullying (Eisman et al., 2015; Gregory et al., 2010).

Meaningful interventions aimed at increasing resilience among at-risk youth populations will be developed based upon what the research indicates to be the most valuable assets to these programs. Extensive research suggests that a key contributor to the effectiveness of such interventions is the strong youth-adult bonds that are formed. This is supported by various outcomes, including the extremely concerning outcome of suicide. One study utilized a cross-sectional design to measure associations between self-reported suicide attempts, emotion regulation challenges, and positive youth-adult relationships. The study included nearly 8,000 high school students from 30 high schools, with students coming from predominantly rural, low-income families and communities (Pisani et al., 2013). Among this sample, 8.6% had attempted suicide in the past year. Notably, a lack of trusted adults at home and difficulties in emotion regulation was strongly associated with an increased risk for having made a suicide attempt over the past year, even when depressive symptoms and demographic factors were held constant (Pisani et al., 2013). Conversely, youth who endorsed a relationship with an adult whom they trusted, particularly when that person was a family member or a member of their school community, had a reduced risk of having attempted suicide, though this effect dissolved when depression symptoms were taken into account (Pisani et al., 2013). This study highlighted that a strong youth-adult bond and skills provided for emotion regulation should be targets of interventions aimed at reducing the risk of suicide among at-risk populations from rural, low-income communities.
Considering whether efforts to strengthen bonds between youth and adults are effective across diverse populations, while reaping the benefits touted by the literature, is also an important perspective to consider. One important question is *does this finding apply to all youth despite their circumstances?* The research is relatively established in defining competent adults as resilient who were raised in an urban environment and born into circumstances that presented them with great adversity (Rew, Grady & Spoden, 2012). Research identifying the relevant protective and risk factors to resilience among youth living in rural areas is scarce (Rew, Grady & Spoden, 2012). Researchers followed 603 fifth graders for five years when participants entered high school. The findings suggested that endorsing competence and self-worth as high school students was associated with multiple factors, but was most robustly predicted by parent perceptions of the child’s temperament. More specifically, temperament was measured as “task persistence,” which is related to hardiness, as defined in an earlier section of this paper. Those parents who viewed their children as high on “task persistence” were more likely to feel competent and have high-self-worth above and beyond all other variables (Rew, Grady & Spoden, 2012). These findings suggest that the effect of adult-youth connections, and specifically the role of a positive relationship between the youth and adult, is not only powerful, but may start much earlier in life than high school, which is often emphasized in resilience research.

One study found that the marginalized youth may benefit the most from their engagement in youth-adult relationships in comparison to other interventions. This study also suggests that the factors that contribute to youth resilience are contextually dependent. For youth with the fewest resources, being invested in relationships with trusted and dependable adults may influence the trajectory of their life even more than youth who have access to more resources.
(Ungar, 2013). Considering that a relationship with an adult is not an inherent trait, this finding supports the idea that resilience is a process and can be greatly influenced by the youth’s environment. It may be that the presence of invested adults may create the space that youth need to engage in ways that promotes their perceived self-worth, which may help them overcome struggles that they may not otherwise be motivated to manage (Ungar, 2013). The evidence is clear that these positive relationships are vital to alleviate the damaging effects of toxic environments (Masten, 2011; Masten & Monn; 2015), and that the ability of youth to overcome their adverse circumstances may be significantly facilitated by the presence of caring adults. If resilience is viewed as a process that can be inspired in a youth, then starting efforts early in their development and providing ample support by caring adults may be key. In fact, research has shown that this process begins early, which is conceptualized as perhaps the most important contributing factor by some researchers. In a 25 year-long longitudinal study, Yates, Egeland and Sroufe (2003) describe the importance of early forging of youth-adult relationships by stating “The successful negotiation of early developmental issues provides a foundation for the process of resilience among disadvantaged youth. This process originates in early transactional exchanges between the child and her or his caregiver that scaffold the child’s developing capacities for adaptive emotion regulation, social engagement and positive expectations of the social world and of the self” (p. 257). Of concern to many families is the feeling that their child is adequately supported by adults from a young age, both within and outside of their family. A family’s community may also cause worry with regard to its impact upon their child’s development. A reasonable question is does the support of adults matter for kids who are routinely exposed to violence in their neighborhood?
Research with Native American and Alaska Native populations have identified connectedness as a culturally based protective factor against poor coping strategies, including the use of substances and suicidal ideation (Mohatt, Fok, Burket, Henry & Allen, 2011). One study conducted with 284 Alaska Native youth showed that protective factors, such as identifying reasons for living and reporting communal mastery, were strong predictors of resilience (Mohatt, Fok, Hurkett, Henry & Allen, 2011). Another study explored protective factors for alcohol abuse and suicidal behavior among Alaska Native Youth and found that social emotional competence mediated the expected negative effects of poverty, increasing the likelihood that Alaska Native youth were achieving higher goals academically and avoiding the use of negative coping strategies, such as substance abuse and truancy (Chain et al., 2014).

Having a supportive relationship with family and adults is consistently identified as being one of the most meaningful protective factors that promotes resilience among Alaska Native youth (Wexler et al., 2013; Chain et al., 2014; Henry et al., 2012). One descriptive study investigated resources upon which Alaska Native youth relied when they encountered stressors. The study revealed that developing and maintaining relationships with others and giving back to one’s family and community, was their most valued support (Wexler et al., 2013). These youth, who lived in primarily rural communities, consistently endorsed the presence of caring adult connections as the key to their success in overcoming struggles, such as mental health concerns, violence, and grief (Wexler et al., 2013).

It appears that even those youth living in neighborhoods that are disorganized and violent, and where a child has endured some sort of trauma (i.e., seeing someone get shot, killed, or having their home robbed), can strongly benefit from strong social ties to stable adult relationships (Butcher, Galanek, Kretschmar & Flannery, 2015). The presence of stable adults in
a youth’s life acts as a buffer against trauma symptoms, significantly mitigating their severity. The maintenance of social relationships between youth and adults is also thought to specifically promote resilience in dangerous neighborhoods, which is vital when a community is seeking to improve the violence and crime rates on its streets, and particularly when the youth plans to remain in the community, contributing to its future stability (Butcher, Galanek, Kretschmar & Flannery, 2015). Those youth that report mental health problems and who are considered at-risk consistently suffer from multiple risk factors and often lack vital protective factors such as strong adult-youth ties. Adolescents who are most at risk for mental health problems are those without a strong parental or other adult bond in their life (Rojas & Coker, 2015). The evidence is consistent that multiple risk factors can be present in a youth’s life, presumably creating a barrier between their current lives and finding a successful and productive life. Consistently, research demonstrates that a vulnerable youth’s sense of connectedness to caring adults acts as a reliable protective factor. Connectedness to a caring adult can mitigate the likelihood of a range of risk behaviors from taking place, in addition to negative life outcomes, with the capacity to transform a child’s current and future life (Sieving et al., 2016).

The literature on the benefits of youth-adult relationships is robust. Of interest to the current project is how these youth-adult relationships may impact school performance and influence perceptions of safety among youth and their adult counterparts. There is a demonstrated link between a youth’s relationships with non-parental adults and early school success (Riley & Cochran, 1987). Young boys who were raised by single-mothers benefited in both their academic success and well-being when they had access to a positive male role model that took them on frequent outings. Similarly, a strong relationship with an adult outside of the
immediate family for both young boys and girls was associated with higher academic performance and more school engagement (Riley & Cochran, 1987).

Research demonstrates that in general, academic success will be higher and a student’s feelings of safety will be enhanced when a youth feels connected to and supported by adults. Enhanced performance in discipline specific endeavors, like science, have also been associated with a youth feeling supported and connected to caregiving adults (Boulifa & Kaouachi, 2015). Graduation rates, as mentioned previously, are also higher among adolescents who endorse close relationships with at least one adult in their school community (Blum, McNeely & Nonnemaker, 2002). Notably, limited research is available in this area, and the field could benefit from continued research that explores the relationship between strong adult-youth bonds and academic success. Even more limited is research related to how parent and adult perceptions of their child’s safety at school impacts their children’s resilience and confidence in themselves to succeed. Nonetheless, many intervention programs are developed to enhance the relationships between adults and children in school and community settings, and these programs utilize the research touting the benefits of such relationships as their foundation. Many of these programs are frequently employed in schools across the United States and other countries, serving both urban and rural communities.

Program Evaluation

As outlined in a previous section, the promotion of resilience has been strongly associated with the presence of stable and reliable adults. Multiple social-emotional intervention programs have been designed to fulfill the need of strengthening connections between youth and adults in both school and community settings.
The Child Adult Relationship Enhancement (CARE) program, which promotes specific skills to enhance interactions of any child or adolescent and adult, is an example of such a program (Gurwitch et al., 2016). The program was developed in response to the alarming rates of physical abuse and neglect of children as the most common form of maltreatment, which affects nearly 2 million children each year (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). The CARE program is not therapeutic in nature, but is rather a set of skills that can support any adult and child aged 2 to 18 years in interacting positively with one another. In a sense, the CARE program was thought of as a prevention tool or model for at-risk children from being the victims of maltreatment or other behavioral problems. The program is thought to disrupt the coercive cycle that is often seen in abuse, improves parent-child relationships, and is a successful substitute to corporal discipline (Gurwitch et al., 2016). Overall, the program seeks to improve the relationship between a parent and their child so that the risk for maltreatment of the child is reduced and the child is less likely to develop behavioral problems that result from negative parent-child interactions (Gurwitch et al., 2016). The CARE program also includes a component of trauma education, which is appropriate for its target treatment population and serves to address the kind of behaviors and emotional problems exhibited by children who are exposed to trauma and abuse. A unique and important distinction of the CARE program is that it is not only utilized by families, but also mental health workers, educators, and other professionals that may interact with children who have been exposed to trauma or maltreatment on a regular basis (Gurwitch et al., 2016). The program is predicated upon the philosophy utilized by the Parent Child Interaction Training (PCIT) program, which is a child-parent interaction training protocol for children ages two to seven. The training is accessible to many different populations and lasts between three to six hours, depending upon the number of
participants in the training session. The program includes a discussion of how trauma impacts youth, how it manifests, and how to appropriately handle and discuss trauma reactions. The approach is simple, and yet can be utilized with great effectiveness by many adults interacting with a young child who has been impacted by trauma. Take for example a physician, who reported that using CARE skills for two to three minutes with a young patient reduced that patient’s anxiety and significantly improved the physician’s ability to perform a difficult procedure (Gurwitch et al., 2016). This training is entirely formed upon the idea that the interaction between a child and an adult can significantly alter that child’s life and meet their needs in a way that others never encounter in their current relationships.

Another frequently utilized school-based intervention program is called the Check & Connect dropout prevention program (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair & Lehr, 2004). The program is an intervention model that was created to promote a student’s engagement in school by improving his or her relationships, problem-solving skills, and persistence to complete necessary tasks. The concept of student engagement is emphasized throughout this intervention, which includes a student’s attendance, attention and participation in classes, as well as the student’s appraisal of the meaning of school. Furthermore, engagement also is thought to include a student’s sense of belonging in a school environment, and whether the student feels cared for, supported, and believes he or she plays a role in the school environment (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair & Lehr, 2004). Most importantly, the variable of engagement has been repeatedly associated with a reduction in dropout rates among high school students (Grannis, 1994). Check & Connect is rather simple in its format, as it designates one or more adults in a school setting to “check-in” with a specific student throughout the day, and in some cases, multiple times a day. The student is then more likely to develop a trusting relationship with that adult and is impacted
by having forged a genuine connection with at least one adult member of their school community (Lehr, Sinclair & Christenson, 2003). In one study that evaluated the effectiveness of Check & Connect, researchers assessed 80 elementary and middle school students who were referred to participate in the program. The majority of these students had issues with attendance, which has been identified as a predictor for disengagement in later education years (Grannis, 1994). The study accounted for individual student risk factors (such as poverty) and prior attendance, and showed that students who perceived having a close relationship with a caring adult were more likely to show improvements in school engagement. Namely, these students who endorsed connections at school showed improved attendance, and were also more likely to be prepared for class, complete their work, and show persistence in their work. The research regarding the program’s effectiveness for ameliorating various negative outcomes for youth is compelling. One study demonstrates the effectiveness of Check & Connect to improve attendance rates, cumulative grade point averages, and decreasing the number of office-discipline referrals (Powers, Hagans & Linn, 2017). Another demonstrates that Check & Connect improves attendance, decreases problematic and disruptive behaviors, and improves academic outcomes for at-risk youth in rural settings (Maynard, Kjellstrand & Thompson, 2014). The Check & Connect program provides extensive evidence that supports the concept of implementing relationship-cased interventions for at-risk students who could greatly benefit from forming reliable connections with caring adults at school.

The focus upon the involvement of an adult in the youth’s lives to improve and inspire the process of resilience is apparent throughout the literature of program evaluation. Another perspective to consider is the power of peer-to-peer relationships, which also has some empirical support (January et al., 2016). In one study, a peer-to-peer support program was evaluated in its
effectiveness to mitigate negative outcomes associated with mental health problems, or for those who are at-risk for significant emotional or behavioral problems. The concept of peer-to-peer support programs emerged from the idea that parents who are navigating community-based services for their children who suffer from emotional and behavioral problems struggle to effectively navigate these services (January et al., 2016). Peer-to-peer support programs have shown some efficacy in assisting parents to increase their perceptions of social support, in addition to their self-efficacy and well-being, for both parents of children with mental illness and those whose children are at risk of suffering from these problems. A pre-post design was utilized to evaluate whether the intervention was implemented as intended, if it produced social support and concrete support gains among the participants, and whether the parent’s level of participation in and their adherence to the intervention was predictive of desirable outcomes (January et al., 2016). The results suggested that the 139 youth who were considered at-risk and who adhered to the program saw considerable benefit in the social and concrete supports they gained. Importantly, the intervention increased parent’s perceived social support and concrete support over time for their children, which appeared to influence the degree to which the children benefited. The results of this study suggest that not only can peer-to-peer support programs be effective, but their results can also be enhanced when the parents of youth are involved and participate in the implementation of the intervention program. The results of this study provide further evidence that even when adolescents and their peers are engaged in social emotional programs aimed at increases positive outcome related to their achievement, mental health, and confidence, the participation of care-taking and stable adults can serve as an enhancer to these efforts above and beyond other important characteristics.
Adult Perspectives of Resilience Building Programs for Children and Adolescents

As the previous section outlined, the participation of caretaking adults can enhance the effects of efforts to promote resilience in at-risk youth. The research presents a gap in knowledge, however, regarding the perspectives of adults in their role and participation of programs to enhance the lives of their children and children within their community. One study evaluated parental attitudes after they participated in a six-session parent-training group and was designed to teach positive parenting skills (Schilling et al., 2017). The program, which was considered to be a child-adult relationship enhancement program in primary care (PriCARE), included parents of children aged two to six years old, where 80 parents participated in the treatment phase of the program and 40 participated in a control group intervention. The children’s behaviors and parenting attitudes were measured at the start and end of the program (at week 0 and week 9), and then at follow up (7 weeks after the program completion, or at 16 weeks from the start of the program). Ultimately, the results suggested that the PriCARE group produced more meaningful differences in behavioral problems among the youth participants when compared to the control group. Furthermore, the participation of parents in the PriCARE group enhanced their attitudes toward their children, which improved their interactions and was thought to support the improvement in behavioral problems in general (Schilling et al., 2017). This research suggests that when parents are involved, and when they see an intervention program working, they may not only perceive the program as more effective, but they may also interact with their children in a more patient and positive manner, which has its own associated effects.

A treatment program for anxious children and their parents called FRIENDS has been studied extensively for its positive effects upon the mental health outcomes for youth. In the first
randomized trial of the FRIENDS program, a family-based group cognitive-behavioral treatment for anxious children was implemented for children aged six to ten years old (Shortt, Barrett & Fox, 2001). The participants were required to have been diagnosed with separation anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, or social phobia to participate. Of interest to researchers was to first determine the effectiveness of the treatment in reducing symptoms of psychopathology among its participants. Secondly, researchers sought to understand if parents also benefited in some way and how their perception of the effectiveness of the program influenced the degree to which their children benefited (Shortt, Barrett & Fox, 2001). Results suggested a strong effect in reducing symptoms in children, and interestingly, the strongest reductions for children were associated with the parents who showed the most confidence in the treatment’s effectiveness. The results of this study suggest that a parent’s perception of treatment can have a meaningful impact upon the degree to which participants benefit from the intervention programs themselves.

Of primary interest in the current paper is to explore how parent perspectives in interventions for youth can influence the face validity and effects of an intervention program aimed at increasing youth among an at-risk population. Research in this area is limited. Additionally, an empirical perspective regarding the implementation of a resilience program in rural and cross-cultural communities is needed.

**Kaleidoscope Connect**

Numerous programs, including Check & Connect, FRIENDS, PriCARE, and the CARE skills programs, exist in hopes to support children in overcoming adversity in their lives by strengthening the relationships they hold with adults in their lives. These programs contain aspects of resilience; however, they are not comprehensive in their aim to promote this specific trait or process.
Kaleidoscope Connect is a social-emotional program whose primary aim is to strengthen the bond between adults and children in rural communities across the United States. The program is disseminated in two separate format options. The first is in the sixth through twelfth grade classroom, which provides a flexible format that can be adopted and adapted by any teacher. It includes 18 lessons total and can be applied across multiple class periods and several weeks or months. Importantly, this intervention program includes training and activities for both adults and youth. The adult training takes place before the youth intervention and is typically more condensed.

The program was developed from a theoretical framework referred to as Integrative Youth Development (IYD; Peterson, 2005). This theoretical framework is grounded in evidence-based resilience research, including positive adult relationships, the ecological influence on a youth’s development, and the presence of risk and protective factors (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner, 2005). The program provides meaningful and flexible lessons and activities that support its youth participants in increasing their protective factors. The IYD framework emphasizes the key components of a young person’s “developmental ecology,” which includes a series of “phactors” that represent empirically identified components of resilience (Peterson, 2005). An example of a “phactor” is “scissor cuts” (represented by the color blue), which indicates the presence of risk factors that challenge the presence and prominence of resilience. Each phactor has been paired with a color on the basic light spectrum that most children learn in school, which is thought to make them more memorable to both adults and youth who participate in the program. The framework is efficient in its design, as each phactor uniquely contributes to a youth’s resilience. Furthermore, the phactors are informed by research that explains how and why that particular characteristic is important to a youth’s
development. Above all, the program emphasizes the relationship between youth and the adults in their life, since research demonstrates that this area may be the most purposeful in terms of producing meaningful change in the trajectory of a young person’s life.

The youth participants complete a program that includes 18 lessons, with each lesson addressing a social or emotional need of the student. The manual, which is provided to each participant, describes a set of values that are represented by colored factors. In the classroom format, each lesson is designed to last about 45 to 60 minutes and can be customized to fit the needs of the intervention group. The program encourages the implementation of the program into a teacher’s course curriculum and allows a flexible program that could be delivered once per week, or every day for several weeks on end, depending upon the class schedule. A secondary format is available to students, which is an immersive weekend experience where the youth receive the information through activities and lessons, which typically occurs on a Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday. In this format, the youth participants experience a distilled and vibrant application of the program’s core messages. This experience, referred to as PHlight Club, includes relationship building activities with adults and youth. The program prides itself on its ability to form connections between youth who are at risk in the surrounding community with adults upon which they can rely. By forging these relationships between youth and adults, the program is thought to promote resilience by increasing their ability to thrive and find lasting success and happiness in their lives. This intervention program aims to achieve the promotion of resilience by effectively utilizing knowledge gleaned from the literature in its design of activities and implementation of lessons.
Kaleidoscope Connect Program Content

Program overview. The Kaleidoscope Connect program includes lessons and activities that promote protective factors of resilience. The program identifies important components of resilience as phactors. These phactors are represented in the program as the colors of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, or as it is often referred to in the program, ROYGBIV phactors). Each color represents a different characteristic that is thought to contribute to or deter from elements of a youth’s life that influences psychological well-being. These phactors are also thought to affect the symptoms of trauma and mental health struggles from which youth suffer. The red phactor, which is the “Rule of 5, Power of More,” represents the theme in the literature that youth who have at least five stable adults with whom they have a relationship are likely to be more resilient. At the start of the intervention program, each youth identifies adults in their life that are called “anchors.” A child’s “anchor” is an adult that secures their “web of support,” which represents the protective factors in a youth’s life. The red phactor is of primary interest to the current study, as it is grounded in the theory that supports the promotion of resilience through adult-youth bonds (Werner, 1992). An additional factor of interest to this study is the blue phactor, which represents the role of risk factors in a child’s developmental landscape. The blue phactor is related to risk-taking behaviors and conditions of adversity that are present in a youth’s life that theoretically interfere with their resilience. The blue phactor represents risk factors such as substance abuse in one’s home, community violence, mental health issues, and poverty, which is grounded in the theory that the effects of these risk factors can be mitigated by strengthening youth’s connections with adults (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).
**Kaleidoscope Connect Lessons.** There are eighteen Kaleidoscope Connect lessons, with each lesson taking 45 to 60 minutes. Lessons are easy to implement, using simple step-by-step instructions and pre-made student worksheets, so that any school staff member could deliver the lessons. The lessons focus on a variety of topics, such as how to: identify and connect with adult support figures, learn and practice strategies related to their own innate characteristics, identify risk factors in their life and devise strategies to prevent these risks from affecting their attitudes and behaviors, and express gratitude towards adults. Each lesson includes a variety of components, including a review of the previous lesson, introduction to the lesson and description of the objective, activities that address the lesson's objective, reflection activity, and preparing students for the next lesson. Lessons can be done in Physical Education/Health class, homeroom, or another class, with one to five lessons being conducted per week, depending on how the lessons best fit the school’s schedule. Lessons are structured around the integrative approach of Kaleidoscope Connect, which promotes seven metrics. These metrics (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet) are described in the below section that outlines the Student Support Card measure.

**Kaleidoscope Connect trainings for adults.** The Kaleidoscope Connect program provides trainings for teachers and other adults that might interact with youth who participate in some aspect (PHlight clubs or lessons) of the program. The trainings generally last one to two days, depending upon the planned agenda, and focus on the dissemination of the seven phactors of Integrative Youth Development previously described, which include essential components of resilience identified throughout the literature. The trainings instill elements of resilience in a way that promotes the presence of protective factors by forming and strengthening relationships with adults. There are two types of trainings implemented, and though they are similar in their
activities, they have some basic differences. The trainings are either the Resilient Educator or Kaleidoscope Academy training.

The Resilient Educator training is comprised of participants from “partner districts” around Alaska, which include the following eight school districts: Craig City School District, Galena City School District, Hydaburg City School District, Iditarod Area School District, Kenai Peninsula School District, Klawock City School District, Southeast Island School District and Yukon Koyukuk School District. These districts are funded by a national grant to receive and implement services by Brightways Learning, which is responsible for the dissemination of the Kaleidoscope Connect programs. As such, these districts represent the communities that have the most consistent exposure to any and all aspects of the program.

Each June, five to seven members from each partner school district are sent to Anchorage, Alaska to attend a one or two-day Resilient Educator training designed to teach educators about the lessons of the Kaleidoscope Connect program, so that they may return to their community to integrate each lesson into their planned curriculum. The training includes, on average, three two-hour segments dedicated to educating participants about the research supporting youth-adult bonds, the aspects of a child’s life that may promote or inhibit their resilience, and a discussion in small group formats designed for problem solving for the integration of each element of the intervention. The day’s activities are part lecture and part interactive activities, such as building a web of support with yarn to represent the seven factors of the Integrative Youth Development framework (IYD).

Similarly, Brightways Learning offers a two-day training called Kaleidoscope Academies, which take place in June through November in various cities throughout Alaska, Montana, Minnesota, and Wyoming. These two-day trainings follow a nearly identical format to
the Resilient Educators trainings; however, they are open to any community member that is interested in learning about IYD or in having the Kaleidoscope Connect program being implemented in their school. As such, attendees may be from a “partner district” school, but will not always be from one of those communities. Additionally, teens from the surrounding community are also encouraged to attend these trainings, so that they are familiar with the influential aspects of IYD.

**PHlight cubs.** As part of Kaleidoscope Connect, students engage in a three-day PHlight Club Academy, where adults and youth partake in collaborative activities to increase connection and allow youth to understand existing supports within their home, school, and community. They practice working together to solve problems and learn helpful lessons about school, life, and friendships. The PHlight Club Academy provides students with the opportunity to recognize and cultivate their leadership skills, build confidence, set goals, manage stress, increase well-being and self-advocacy, and make positive connections with adults. The PHlight clubs often take place over a weekend and are hosted by the local school. These events aim to educate youth about the power of adult-youth bonds through the use of interactive activities carried out between the youth and their adult community members. ROYGBIV is emphasized and at the end of each PHlight club, the youth are assessed to gauge their learning by completing short surveys. These data have been collected from various communities over the past 6 years. It is from the PHlight club’s learning assessment that the current study will gather post-hoc data from the Red and Blue phactors.

**Rationale for the Current Study**

The current study explored the perspectives of adults who participate in the Kaleidoscope Connect program. Previous research has revealed that the perspectives of adults in youth-
oriented intervention programs are largely underrepresented (Vadell et al., 2015; Kang et al., 2017). It is particularly important to understand the perspective of adults whose participation is required in intervention programs that seek to support youth, as their contribution may be a vital ingredient to the program’s success (Schilling et al., 2017). Once the perspective of adults is well understood, future intervention programs can address issues that emerge and promote ideas that work well to recruit and retain the participation of adults in similar interventions.

As such, we sought to address the lack of representation of adult perspectives in youth interventions through the following research questions. We were interested in determining whether participation in the Kaleidoscope Connect program promotes resilience in youth from the perspectives of adults. In addition, we also explored whether the program enhances the perceived safety and connectedness of the community and school climate in which the youth live and learn, from the adults’ perspectives. Finally, explored whether Kaleidoscope Connect is reasonable and realistic for its participants and whether it has meaningful face validity in the communities in which it is implemented.

These questions were evaluated within a sample that reflects a large cultural context of rural communities across Alaska and Montana, which have some of the highest burden of psychological problems and behavioral difficulties among youth in comparison to many other states (Wexler et al., 2013). The research questions were explored through distributing a survey and conducting small focus groups within a variety of communities in Alaska and Montana in which the program has been implemented. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data serves the purpose of providing a comprehensive picture of the participants’ experiences, as quantitative data can provide concrete observations that are expanded upon in qualitative interviews, and quantitative data provides specifics about themes discovered in qualitative
interviews. The program is predicated upon a fundamental idea that the research reviewed previously suggests: the connection between adults and youth can have a profound impact upon the resilience of youth. Without the perspectives of adults, the arguably most vital resource that is available to children is in jeopardy of being underutilized or overlooked.
CHAPTER 3
STUDY I METHOD & RESULTS

Research Design

Study I utilized a primarily quantitative approach to the exploration of the research questions outlined previously. Descriptive analyses were used to summarize demographic information, the nature of the adult-youth relationships (e.g., teachers or community members), and general impressions of the Kaleidoscope Connect program.

The current study was summative in nature, as it sought to determine if the Kaleidoscope Connect program strengthens perceptions of youth gaining skills in resilience, safety, and in forming effective connections to adults. The current study was also formative in nature, as it sought to determine what works about this particular program in its promotion of resilience, among other constructs of interest, according to its participants, as well as illuminate what could be changed to enhance the program’s face validity. These data can inform the perspectives of program developers, as the results are highly useful in the context of program implementation by providing actionable information (Patton, 2015).

Study I: Method

Target Population and Sample

A non-probability, purposive-sampling procedure was utilized to assess the questions of interest in this study. The researcher recruited participants who attended one of three Kaleidoscope Connect trainings that took place in the summer of 2019 and winter of 2020. Representation of the eight districts mentioned previously varied across Kaleidoscope Trainings, though all Resilient Educator training attendees (the second training, discussed in more detail
below) represented those districts. The eight partner districts serve a high population of Alaska Native/American Indian youth and students, and at least 40-60% of participants from Study I and Study II of this project represented these districts. It is important to understand the demographic representation of Native students in these communities.

**Table 1**

*Percentage of Children Identifying as Native Alaskan/American Indian across partner districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of District</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Identifying as Native Alaskan/American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craig City School District</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galena City School District</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydaburg City School District</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iditarod Area School District</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenai Peninsula School District</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klawock City School District</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Island School District</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon Koyukuk School District</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data provided by Brightways Learning, 2019*

All adult participants that attended these trainings were asked to complete the survey. Inclusion criteria for completion of the survey was minimal and only required that the participant be at least 18 years old and have participated in the current the training. Participants were predominantly from Alaska, but participants from Montana also attended. The sample size for the survey return was 76, and after data cleaning, $n = 56$. 
Data Collection and Procedures

A survey created by the researcher, which is referred to as the Kaleidoscope Connect Evaluation Survey (KCES), was utilized to assess various aspects of the project (see Appendix A). The KCES investigated general demographic characteristics of the participants (e.g., gender, ethnic background, and age), in addition to themes of interest to the current project. The themes of interest included an exploration of how feasible it was for the adults to participate in the program and whether they found each component of the program valuable. The KCES also assessed whether adults perceived the program as effective in enhancing the safety and connectedness in youth’s schools and their community. In addition, it explored whether adults perceive the program as being effective in enhancing a youth’s resilience. Furthermore and as relevant to the concept of resilience, to address an adult’s awareness of the risk-taking behaviors in which the youth engage, questions reflected themes from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1990). The YRBSS is a survey tool used to monitor six categories of health-related behaviors that are thought to contribute to causes of death and disability among youth, adolescents, and young adults. These categories include behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, sexual behaviors associated with unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, alcohol and substance use, tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and inadequate physical exercise (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1990). For the purpose of this study, the items that were inspired by the YRBSS included the following: a) Over the past 12 months, did a youth you know attempt suicide? b) To your knowledge, over the past 12 months, did a youth you know engage in a physical fight? c) To your knowledge, over the past 12 months, has a youth you know been electronically bullied (including being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or
other social media)? The researcher then utilized the results of the KCES to describe whether adults perceive the program to influence these behaviors in a desirable direction (i.e., decreasing school bullying, violence, and suicidal ideation or attempts). These themes were assessed by visual analysis of descriptive statistics, which supplemented the richer information provided by the qualitative analyses. The information gathered from these items contributed to the face validity of this study, as it required adults to be engaged and invested in the program and believe in its effects for the intervention to be most effective.

The majority of KCES surveys were completed at the end of the training event to all participants willing to complete it. The survey took approximately 12 minutes to complete. When used at the end of training, the KCES was administered in an electronic format through the survey tool provided by Qualtrics. To capture a wider range of participants’ perspectives, the survey link was also distributed by Brightways Learning through an email listserv of prior program participants. For either format, no identifying information was collected. No incentives were provided to participants to complete the survey and it was clearly communicated to participants that their participation was entirely voluntary if they chose to decline.

Data Analysis

The survey results were entered into the statistical software program SPSS, Version 24 (IBM, 2016) and coded accordingly into the variables of interest. The data were analyzed in terms of descriptive and frequency statistics (e.g., mean, median, standard deviation) to provide a description of certain items being endorsed in particular directions (e.g., 79% of the sample endorsed a youth they know having attempted suicide). Demographic data were also analyzed using this same software, and summarized in a descriptive format in the results section of the study. As there were a number of text-entry survey questions, those data were visually analyzed
for themes and manually counted or summarized by the researcher and their research assistant, which was possible given the small sample size of $n = 56$.

**Study I: Results**

Study I included data collection through the distribution of the Kaleidoscope Connect Evaluation Survey (KCES) survey among participants who had participated in at least one of the Kaleidoscope Connect program. This included lesson dissemination in the school setting, as well as participation in PHlight club, the Resilient Educator training, and the Kaleidoscope Academy (referred to as the “Adult Training”). In addition, participants who were a community member or relative of a youth could also participate. A total of $N = 56$ participants completed the survey.

**Demographics**

The participants’ demographic information from Study I data collection are summarized in the table below.

**Table 2**

*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study I Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native/American Indian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleut</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants represented a range of relationships and connections to youth who participated in one of the Kaleidoscope Connect activities. Their roles included parents (8%),
teachers (46%), staff (25%), and community members (23%), which included roles such as administrators, therapists, and principals. Of the parents who participated in the Kaleidoscope Connect activities, 64% had a child who also participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity (13% in Kaleidoscope Connect Lessons and 88% in PHlight Club) and 36% had a child who did not participate in any Kaleidoscope Connect program activity. Of the respondents, 18% of adults were invited to participate in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity by a youth as their “anchor,” and 80% were not specifically invited and named by the youth to be an “anchor,” with 2% of the sample being unsure whether the youth named them as their anchor. Approximately 53% of respondents endorsed being “closely connected” with at least one youth who has participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity, whereas 47% endorsed not being closely connected with a youth.

On average, 82% of respondents participated in the Kaleidoscope Connect Academy (Adult Training), 40% attended the Resilient Educator Training, 20% participated in the dissemination of the Kaleidoscope Connect Lessons, 43% participated in a PHlight Club, and 5% endorsed another activity (e.g., grant planning meetings and Power of Web supports training). The lowest number of times a respondent participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity was one time, and the highest number of times was “more than 12,” which pertained to any combination of the activities.

**Suicide, Risk Factors and Protective Factors**

Participants were asked to report the number of suicides youth had attempted and completed in their community, as well as whether that youth had participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity. Those results are summarized in the table below.
Table 3

Known suicide and suicidality among youth across study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suicide/ Suicidality among Youth</th>
<th>Percent of Participants</th>
<th>Mean/SD # of Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knew a youth who attempted suicide in past 12 months</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>m = 2, SD = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knew a youth who completed suicide in the past 12 months</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>m = 1, SD 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents also reported information about whether a youth in their community who had completed suicide had participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity. Respondents shared that 55% of youth they knew who had completed suicide had participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity, 15% had not participated and 30% were unsure of whether the youth participated or not.

Respondents were asked to report the most common risk factors observed in their communities that contributed to unforgiving circumstances (i.e., high poverty, high substance abuse problems, high suicidality among residents, etc.) for youth, as well as protective factors (i.e., connection & innate characteristics). For this question, participants were able to write in their response in the survey. Those results are summarized in the table below.
Table 4

Reported Youth’s Risk Factors by Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Innate Characteristics</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>School Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Respect for themselves</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strong Social Norms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grave Passive Neglect</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal Ideation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked to list the most common protective factors they observed in their communities that supported youth resilience. The most common response, which was endorsed by 41% of the sample, was a reference to connection. Those responses that conveyed the concept of connection included terms and phrases such as “connection to others,” “friends,” “family,” “belonging,” “peer groups,” “adult connections,” and “youth connections.” Other responses included school staff, safety of living in dorms, having respect for themselves, self-advocacy, innate characteristics, forethought plans for when things go bad, and strong social norms.

Value and Message of Kaleidoscope Connect program

Respondents were asked to share what they felt was the primary message of the Kaleidoscope Connect program. The most common message respondents shared referred to connections or relationships with adults (provided by 64% of the sample), with responses
ranging from “a kid needs a web” to “build strong relationships with youth,” and in the spirit of incorporating Kaleidoscope Connect program language, “building a web of support and understanding the kiddo in full color.” Other respondents included connectivity to self, trauma informed, “connections from the heart matter,” love and relationships, love and respect, and “find your anchors.” One respondent shared “kids aren’t broken; they need a web,” while another shared “highly-connected kids are safer, more resilient than their less connected peers… if you’re chose[n] an anchor, step up.”

Participants were also asked about the aspect of the Kaleidoscope Connect program that they most valued. Participants shared values that included the “anchor” concept (endorsed by 39% of the sample). Some examples of responses that were coded as referring to the “anchor” concept included “bringing awareness to your web thickness,” “making connections,” and “learning how to be a successful anchor.” Some respondents referred to specific components of the Kaleidoscope Connect program itself, including PHlight Club (3% of the sample) and the ROY G BIV framework (11% of the sample). The concept of having a “common language” was also referenced (13% of the sample), as well as the Kaleidoscope Connect program taking on a “holistic approach” to supporting youth (5% of the sample).

**Primary Research Questions**

**Resilience.** As we proposed to investigate in Research Question 1, this study sought to understand the degree to which adult participants believed the Kaleidoscope Connect program supported and promoted resilience among youth participants. This question was first addressed through investigating whether adults perceived the youth’s participation in the program as being effective in bringing the youth closer to the adults in their community. Participants endorsed their impressions on a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 being *the program does not strengthen*...
connection, 5 being the program moderately strengthens connection, and 10 being The program significantly strengthens connection. The mean for participants’ responses was 8.16 (SD = 1.6), with the responses ranging from 4 (i.e., the program moderately strengthens connection, endorsed by 2% of the sample) to 10 (i.e., the program significantly strengthens connection, endorsed by 18% of the sample).

Additionally, this question also explored the degree to which adults perceived the program as effectively contributing to suicide prevention. Participants endorsed their impression on a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 being no prevention, 5 being moderate prevention, and 10 being excellent prevention. The mean score for participants’ responses was 7.56 (SD = 1.9), with responses ranging from 1 (i.e., no prevention endorsed by 2% of the sample) to 10 (i.e., excellent prevention; endorsed by 12% of the sample).

**School Climate and Community Safety.** As we proposed to investigate in Research Question 2, the current study also sought to assess the degree to which adults perceived the Kaleidoscope Connect program as being effective in promoting and enhancing school climate and promoting a safer community. These questions were addressed through respondents reporting the degree to which the program appeared to achieve these goals. With regard to the effect of the Kaleidoscope Connect program helping to create a more positive school climate, participants rated their perception on a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 being isn’t helpful, 5 being moderately helpful, and 10 being extremely helpful. The mean score for participants’ responses was 8 (SD =1.5), with responses ranging from 1 (i.e., isn’t helpful, endorsed by 2% of the sample) to 10 (i.e., extremely helpful, endorsed by 16% of the sample).

The participants’ perception of the Kaleidoscope Connect program’s effect on community safety was also assessed using a 10-Point Likert scale, with an endorsement of 1
suggesting the participant believed the Kaleidoscope Connect program *Isn’t helpful* at increasing community safety, 5 suggesting that the program is *moderately helpful*, and 10 suggesting that the program is *extremely helpful*. The mean score for participants’ responses was 7.56 (SD = 1.6), with responses ranging from 3 (i.e., slightly helpful, endorsed by 5% of the sample) to 10 (i.e., extremely helpful, endorsed by 10% of the sample).

**Feasibility.** As we proposed to investigate in Research Question 3, the final primary research question of the current study explored the degree to which adults involved in the dissemination of Kaleidoscope Connect activities found the program to be feasible (realistic and accessible). Participants responded to an item on a 10-point Likert scale, wherein a value of 1 represented the perspective of the Kaleidoscope Connect program as *not feasible at all*, a value of 5 represented the program as being *moderately feasible*, and a value of 10 representing the perspective that the Kaleidoscope Connect program is *extremely feasible*. The mean score for participants’ responses was 7.8 (SD = 2), with responses ranging from 1 (i.e., not feasible at all, endorsed by 3% of the sample) to 10 (i.e., extremely feasible, endorsed by 13% of the sample).
CHAPTER 4

STUDY II METHOD & RESULTS

Study II: Method

Research Design

Study II utilized a focus group format, which was facilitated by the researcher over Zoom, and was comprised of a predetermined set of questions (see Appendix B). The focus groups included three 60-75 minutes meetings, with 5 participants (n =15) per group. The focus groups provided the qualitative nature of this study and fulfilled the objective of determining summative and formative research goals (Patton, 2015), enhancing the clarity and depth of the results.

Target Population and Sample

Study II sought to explore a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences of the Kaleidoscope Connect program. As such, adults who have both participated in a PHlight club and attended the adult trainings were recruited for participation in one of three focus groups. One focus group was conducted at the adult training, which took place in Aleyaska, Alaska in June of 2019, one was conducted in Missoula, Montana in June of 2019, and one was conducted in Anchorage, Alaska in November of 2019. Research suggests that 12 interviewees, when they are administered in a standardized way (i.e., the questions are consistent across groups), is sufficient in capturing novel perspectives in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The term “saturation” refers to this criterion and is considered the gold standard in qualitative research in terms of determining adequate sample size (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The current study included 15 interviewees from various intervention sites, meeting and exceeding the saturation standard. The goal of the focus groups was to garner a deeper understanding of the
participants’ experiences of the Kaleidoscope Connect program. The current study utilized a purposeful sampling procedure, as participants were recruited when they considered themselves to be knowledgeable of the Kaleidoscope Connect program through their experience with an adult training, a PHlight club, the Kaleidoscope Connect lessons, or a combination of any of these three Kaleidoscope Connect components. The majority of the participants in the focus groups were from Alaska ($n = 12$), though some attendees were from Montana ($n = 3$) as well.

**Data Collection and Procedures**

To gather more detailed information regarding the experience of adults in the Kaleidoscope Connect program, focus groups in each community were conducted. The questions (see Appendix B) explored the perspectives of adults who have participated in the Kaleidoscope Connect training or other components at least once previously. Any adult who fulfilled the previous attendance requirement was invited to attend. The questions were standardized across groups, to produce the most reliable investigation of perspectives. The principle investigator conducted the focus groups using Zoom, which is an online video conferencing application available through the University of Montana.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative interview data gathered from the focus groups was recorded and then transcribed verbatim. These data were then coded using NVivo 12 Qualitative Analytic Software (NVivo Pro 12; 2009), a software option that examines qualitative data by organizing responses into potential patterns or themes. The principal investigator coded all interviews, and one research assistant coded 30% of the interviews, so that two different researchers coded a portion of each interview, to calculate interrater reliability. A codebook was created to guide coders in the process of determining the emergence of discrepancies. Upon the completion of coding, the
principal investigator and research assistant met over Zoom to discuss and resolve discrepancies in coding, until 100% agreement was reached. The process of establishing consistency between coders supported the necessary degree of inter-rater reliability and agreement, with an overall interrater reliability value of .88 before discussing coding discrepancies, and agreeing upon the appropriate codes for those divergent decisions (Patton, 2015).

The current study examined interviews utilizing a content analysis methodology, which allowed for the identification of patterns and themes that emerged from the data (Patton, 2015). Identifying patterns through qualitative analysis provided descriptive explanations of phenomena to be illuminated. Furthermore, the identification of themes, which referred to categorical or topical constructs, highlighted consistent topics that emerged from the participants’ experiences (Patton, 2015). Content analysis in qualitative research is the most appropriate methodology to go beyond the story provided by identifying and quantifying the endorsement of certain outcomes dichotomously. Furthermore, content analysis allowed for the necessary reduction and sense-making of otherwise voluminous qualitative material by identifying core consistencies and meanings across interviews.

As mentioned previously, there exists a gap in the literature of youth-focused social-emotional intervention programs that explore the perspectives of participating adults. Because the current study sought to determine the extent to which adults’ perspectives support the existing goals of the Kaleidoscope Connect program, a qualitative inductive analysis was used when exploring content in interviews. Qualitative inductive analysis can verify theories through content examination, while also being flexible enough to allow the emergence of other unidentified themes to emerge (Patton, 2015). The identified themes and patterns can inform the implementation of the Kaleidoscope Connect program by revealing its most effective and useful
aspect identified by its participants. Content and inductive qualitative analysis can be used to address questions such as “what, why and how” from the data categories, which allowed the researcher to determine the organization and meaning of the raw data collected.

For this project, the principal investigator sought to describe and understand the promotion of resilience through the social-emotional curriculum that strengthens youth-adult bonds. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify which aspects of the Kaleidoscope Connect program are useful and realistic from the adult’s point of view. Therefore, the inductive strategy of data analysis provided the core consistencies and meanings of the intervention program to surface, helping to identify how the program helps to support youth, why participants believe this is the case, and what works to contribute to the program’s effectiveness. Through data analysis, the concepts and themes identified through the coding process were categorized into separate constructs. The coding process included open, axial and selective coding procedures to support the identification of themes and patterns, as well as the analysis of converging and diverging themes across the data collected (Patton, 2015). Open coding describes the process of identifying themes that emerge by skimming the data by eye (e.g., what stands out a potential theme(s)?). Axial coding is the drawing of direct relationships between identified themes (e.g., how do these two ideas seem to be connected between participants?). Selective coding describes the process of identifying the “core dimension” that includes all or almost all data (e.g., if there is a dominant theme in the data, what could it be?). These styles of coding are rooted in grounding theory, which describes the process of being immersed in the data, which allows for relationships and novel questions to emerge (Patton, 2015).

In an effort to determine the degree to which consistency exists across interviews, as well as between different data collection methods, a method triangulation process was employed.
In contrast to mixed-methods triangulation, which would require higher-order statistical analyses, the quantitative data collected was used to supplement the story told by qualitative analyses. Therefore, those data collected in a quantitative manner were summarized and used to supplement, enhance and contrast themes identified through qualitative approaches. Method triangulation analysis works to reduce systematic bias and distortion by checking findings gathered through one data collection method against another (Patton, 2015). The process of triangulation increases credibility, by strengthening the idea that a study’s findings are more than an artifact of a single method, and are supported by multiple sources of information (Patton, 2015). This process is strengthened by the purposive sampling strategy used in the current study, which provided the opportunity to comprehensively explore as much data as possible that was relevant to the research questions. By examining the data gleaned from the current study and comparing the different data sources, the researcher determined the level of consistency by comparing different data sources through an in-depth discussion of the differences and commonalities in the discussion section of the study. The coding team met regularly to discuss the process of these procedures, and relied upon the expertise of committee members to inform qualitative decision-making processes. Finally, analyst triangulation (i.e., the comparison of data sources analyzed between researchers) occurred throughout the coding process to ensure inter-rater reliability and agreement.

**Study II: Results**

Study II examined three research questions from the perspective of adults who have themselves participated, or who have known youth who have participated in the Kaleidoscope Connect program. The first question explored adult impressions of how the Kaleidoscope Connect program may promote resilience among the youth they support. This question was
measured by assessing adult perceptions of the program’s effect on increasing closeness between youth and adults in their communities, as well as how the program prevents suicide among youth. The second question explored how Kaleidoscope Connect, from adult perspectives, enhances the perception of safety among the community and school climate where adults work and children participate. This question was primarily explored through assessing the degree to which adults felt that the program enhanced their own feelings of safety and connection to others (promoting a positive climate) in their community or school, and the degree to which they believed children within their own communities felt enhanced safety and connectedness to others as a result of the program. Finally, the third question explored whether adult participants felt the program was realistic and accessible. Participants were asked to report the ways in which the program was effective, how access to the program could be enhanced, as well as its overall feasibility.

Study II of the present study involved the researcher conducting three focus groups, with five participants in each group (n = 15). The focus groups took place on the final day of either the Kaleidoscope Connect Academy or the Resilient Educator trainings. These trainings took place in Alyeska, AK, Missoula, MT, and Anchorage, AK. Of note, every participant who participated in the Study II data collection also participated in Study I, therefore the perspectives of focus group participants are also represented among the quantitative data in Study I.
Demographics

The demographic information of Study II participants is summarized in the table below.

Table 5

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Study II Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navajo</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haida</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
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<td>High school degree/Equiv.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Partnership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the focus groups had participated, on average, in three Kaleidoscope Connect activities, with the most common activity attended being PHlight club (endorsed by nine participants, or 60% of the sample). Keeping in mind that because of the nature of the communities wherein Kaleidoscope Connect is implemented, participants hold multiple roles in their relationships with youth in this context. The roles of participants included teachers (60%), parents (13%), staff (60%), and community members (60%), which included an administrator, a paraprofessional, and a therapist.

Themes across all research questions were organized into primary themes and subthemes. In congruence with inductive analysis strategies and open, axial and (ultimately) selective, after transcripts were coded and organized into discrete parts (e.g. primary research questions), connections were drawn between codes so that the selective coding process could begin. Ultimately, within the selective coding process, a “primary theme” was identified as such when it intuitively captured the subject matter for subthemes (e.g., internal characteristics, resources, and cultural values are intuitively organized under the concept of Protective Factors). Similarly, subthemes were those statements that were easily described by a ‘parent’ concept, but that were referenced less often, or those that conceptually related to the primary research questions (e.g.,
substance abuse and mental health are conceptually related to Risk Factors but occurred infrequently compared to that primary theme). For each primary theme, the number of times it was referenced is reported, as well as the proportion of the conversation the theme assumed across all focus group interviews, which is presented as a percentage. For each subtheme, the number of times it was referenced was reported, as well as the proportion of the conversation the theme assumed within its primary, or parent, theme. Reporting the results in this way gives the reader a clear sense of how much of the discussion explored the primary theme, as well as the concentration of emergent subthemes within the specific concepts explored.

Primary Research Questions

Resilience (Referenced 284 Times, 61% of Discussion Across all Groups). As we proposed to investigate in Research Question 1, participants were asked to discuss the degree to which they felt the Kaleidoscope Connect program enhanced resilience among the participating youth. The primary ways the researcher conceptualized assessing this topic, as outlined by the previous sections of this paper, were to examine the degree to which program participation enhanced connectedness between youth and adults, the degree to which the program may help protect against suicidal ideation, as well as exploring what other themes of the program promote resilience among youth. Furthermore, participants were also asked to discuss the ways in which the youth’s environments and lives may include factors that contribute to their hardship and increase their risk for poor outcomes (e.g., mental illness, substance abuse, poverty). These data were examined to identify relevant themes that participants appeared to feel and think were related to resilience. Within Research Question 1, two primary themes were identified by the researcher, which included Risk Factors (136 references, 48% of Resilience discussion) and
Protective Factors (148 references, 52% of Resilience discussion). Both primary themes in this section included several subthemes, which are discussed in detail below.

**Risk Factors (Referenced 136 Times, 48% of Resilience Discussion).** Participants in all focus groups discussed risk factors for the youth in their community when asked to describe factors that promote, or threaten, resilience. Participants’ conversations regarding Risk Factors were analyzed and many subthemes were identified, including intergenerational or secondary trauma, poverty and homelessness, isolation, high ACE scores, incarceration, domestic violence, sexual assault, abuse, substance abuse concerns (including alcohol and cannabis use), identity development and culture, suicide and mental health concerns.

Participants collectively agreed that youth in their communities share a high burden of social and environmental problems that challenge their path to success and health. For instance, the subtheme of “intergenerational or secondary trauma” (referenced nine times, 7% of the Risk Factors discussion), referring to the witnessing of traumatic experiences by youth that their family, friends, or acquaintances encountered, was discussed. When describing youth who are raised in small communities that encounter traumatic events, one participant shared “when you’re in a village where everyone knows each other…it feels like nothing has been done about what’s happening to them.” In one focus group, participants discussed that many youth in their community experience turmoil within their family system that is not often disclosed or acknowledged. One participant shared a description of her own Alaskan community that sheds light upon the previous statement, stating “[our community] is very isolated from everywhere else…the school and the community are kind of different because it’s so isolating. There is no street where everyone goes, there’s no town, there’s no store, there’s no gather- the only gathering place is the school.” Conversely, one participant (a teacher) who had moved from a
highly rural location on the Yukon River, to a more urban area, described the disconnectedness she observed in her new community. She described significant poverty among primarily white youth in this new area, and that those youth’s homes are very spread out, therefore “they have no money, so they have no transportation. They have no way to get connected.”

Participants seemed to draw a connection between youth experiencing “intergenerational or secondary trauma” to the experience of “poverty and homelessness,” which was identified as a subtheme (referenced 6 times, 4% of the Risk Factors discussion). Furthermore, participants described a culture of disconnectedness as a result of the subtheme of “isolation” (referenced seven times, 5% of the Risk Factors discussion). For example, participants shared that intergenerational or secondary trauma often carries a burden of poverty, and may lead families to pursue a more isolated lifestyle, which interferes with youth’s ability to “build a strong web” with stable adults outside of their family.

Another identified subtheme that centered upon youth’s experiences with their family and in their communities was that of “High ACE scores” (referenced 17 times, 13% of the Risk Factors discussion), as one focus group member reported “I don’t think that there’s any ACE you can name that a youth doesn’t have in Alaskan Native Communities… very few children have zero.” Many focus group members also discussed the subtheme of “incarceration” (referenced 3 times, 2% of the Risk Factors discussion), as some youth in their communities observed their parents be in and out of jail. Other subthemes relating to family or community relationships included youth who witnessed “domestic violence” (referenced 5 times, 4% of the Risk Factors discussion) and who had endured “sexual assault” (referenced 2 times, 1% of the Risk Factors discussion). Additionally, the subtheme of “abuse” (referenced 16 times, 14% of the Risk Factors discussion) was discussed at length. Participants shared youth’s experiences of
enduring abuse from family members or trusted family connections with others, and how such an experience “wasn’t rare enough”.

The subtheme of “substance abuse” concerns were mentioned as an important risk factor (referenced 14 times, 10% of the Risk Factor discussion), citing alcohol use (abuse and bootlegging) as the most common concern facing youth (referenced seven times, 5% of Risk Factor discussion, and notably 50% of substance abuse concerns). The recreational use of cannabis was also mentioned (referenced four times, 3% of the Risk Factor discussion, and notably 29% of substance abuse concerns). One participant, a teacher working in a rural Alaska community, shared that among the 200 students that attended her school in the months between June and December of 2018, 15 children experienced the death of a parent due to an overdose. Another participant shared that certain youth who had caregivers who abused drugs and who had made it to college, would end up homeless over winter or summer break (when dorms close), and would not feel safe returning home because of ongoing drug use among family members.

When considering psychological stress among youth, participants discussed the interplay of the subtheme “identity development and culture” (referenced three times in the context of Risk Factors, 1% of Risk Factor discussion). The discussion of culture and identity development included diverse themes across all groups, including those seeking continuity and stability in relationships. One participant shared “[some youth are] so focused on the ‘capitol F’ family and they just kept getting hurt… and they started to realize that they can connect to other adults and that is okay… so they know that they can reach out to other adults,” suggesting that the process of youth identifying safe relationships with adults outside of their nuclear family is both painful and confusing. Another participant, who identified as a teacher, explored the journey of youth in their attempt to reconcile identities that straddle two different worlds. That participant shared
“the students are facing cultural self-identity, you know, am I going to be part of the Western World and be all hidden figures and listen to this rap music? Or am I going to be learning our language or learning our songs? They might think its old school to learn our beliefs. And so I think a lot of our students have self-identity and self-esteem problems.” Participants attributed both strengths (discussed in Protective Factors section) and risks factors for youth associated with the integration of their Native heritage and culture, and navigating the mainstream culture of the modern, Western world.

The subthemes of "suicide" (referenced 38 times, 28% of Risk Factors discussion) and “mental health concerns” (referenced 16 times, 12% of Risk Factors discussion) also exemplified a significant burden on the communities represented in the focus groups. Suicide had touched every participant’s (n = 15) life in some way, whether it be a youth they knew well or a youth whose family member they knew well. Participants reported that this was a difficult subject to discuss, emphasizing that it “happens too much” in their communities. With respect to suicidality, participants in one focus group shared a reflection of a young female identified student who attended a PHlight club in rural Alaska. The participants stated that she was a “a girl… somebody said that they were concerned about her, and suicidal ideations, and one of the people at her school found her out behind the school with a rope tied behind a tree ready to hang herself… they called in all of these counselors and her mom, and the principal, a staff of Brightways… and they’re like ‘Oh, what can we do for you, what can we do for you?’ She’s looking at the counselors and saying, ‘Who the hell are you? I don’t even know you. You can’t do anything for me’… and she stood up in the room with all of these people and she said ‘I don’t know what’s wrong with all you people! I just need a web, I just need a web!’ The participants went on to share a story of this young girl teaching the room full of adults about the concept and
the language of the Web, with the principal saying “Well, gosh, I’m in your web, I’m one of your anchors,’ to which she replied ‘You’re not one of my anchors, you’ll be gone in a few months. Teachers and principals don’t stay around here!” Shortly after this moment, the young girl’s mother asked ‘am I in your web, honey?’ to which the girl replied ‘yes mom, but you’re not enough. I need more than one person.’ ” The participants noted that the youth felt empowered to identify her own anchors, and teach adults around her the language of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework. Through PHlight club, participants explained that she learned to identify what she needed to feel supported and get the help she desperately needed. Participants reported that “she is doing great now” and credit her success to the idea that “knowing your own web can be hugely impactful in later success.”

These results of the Risk Factors subthemes and associated coverage are summarized in the table below.

**Figure 1**

*Risk Factors Subtheme Summary of Coverage*
Protective Factors (Referenced 148 Times, 57% of Resilience Discussion).

Participants endorsed numerous ways and provided multiple stories in which youth were resilient and thrived despite challenging circumstances. Focus group members discussed the ways in which participation in the Kaleidoscope Connect program contributed to a youth’s ability to successfully overcome their unforgiving circumstances. Participants’ conversations regarding Protective Factors were analyzed and many subthemes were identified, including support from adults, web, anchors, language, cultural identity, religion and internal characteristics.

Examination of this discussion revealed the subtheme of “support from adults” (referenced 60 times, 41% of the Protective Factors discussion), and how this particular emphasis of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework impacts youth participants, is important. All focus groups endorsed an understanding and appreciation for how the Kaleidoscope Connect framework works to enhance connections between youth and adults in their communities, and all focus groups included references to the subtheme “web” (referenced 22 times, 15% of the Protective Factors discussion), as well as the subtheme “anchors” (referenced 10 times, 7% of the Protective Factors discussion) of a youth throughout the conversation. The support and connection to adults, as well as to one another, that the Kaleidoscope Connect framework cultivates was among the most valued characteristic of the curriculum and was highlighted across all focus groups. This value was made evident by the high proportion of discussions about connection, as references to the subthemes of support from adults, web and anchor comprised 63% of the Protective Factors discussion. Participants generally conveyed the belief that these aspects of the Kaleidoscope Connect program are the strongest contributing factors to the program’s effectiveness in mitigating risk factors, promoting resilience, and enhancing the quality of youth’s lives in their communities.
Those youth who participated were perceived to have an easier time reaching out and sharing their struggles with adults and peers in their community. One participant shared their experiences with a young girl whose father was repeatedly incarcerated (for years at a time) and who was described as “painfully shy and had severe social anxiety.” That young girl, who after being encouraged to attend a Phlight club and reluctantly did so, “was a totally different kid” because she “learned how to build her web.” The participant shared that the young girl “thought, this is so stupid and I’m not doing it,” but the participant explained, “she just said to herself ‘no, I’m going to do it’ and she signed up a few days before Phlight club, and that was years ago, and she has her adults now that she knows she can lean into her web.” Participants reiterated throughout these discussions that despite having multiple challenges and devastating circumstances in their lives, the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum creates a system of support for youth that is protective and facilitates their survival, as well as their success in many cases.

One participant, a teacher from rural Montana, shared “I have three students, two who have graduated and all who had suicidal ideation but never formally attempted, but lots of talk. Fortunately, all of them have been to Phlight Club events, understood the language… knew enough to know that they could reach out and send an email. That was how one of them contacted me. The other one just came and talked. They knew there were anchors that they could talk to and say ‘I’m scared, because I’m going to hurt myself.’ The other one is still in high school and we’re connected enough that when he kind of goes dark, I can say, are you thinking about hurting yourself? And he will say ‘not this time.’” All participants (100%) across each focus group had at least one story of forming connections with youth in their community through a Kaleidoscope Connect activity, and being named an anchor by that youth.
The subtheme “language” \((\text{referenced 29 times, 20\% of the Protective Factors discussion})\) of the program appeared to have a particularly important role in Kaleidoscope Connect’s perceived impact upon youth leaning on their anchors for support, as one participant described (while referring to her rural Alaska community) “it’s just overrun with scissor cuts and trauma. And sometimes it feels hopeless, but what I love about this framework is that when I do talk to my students who are now in their 20s, I can use this language with them, and they can look back and see who their anchors were in high school, and begin to reconnect with anchors that matter to them back then, and who thankfully when they do reconnect with them, are very happy to provide support, and I can count on immediately right now, at least one hand, five kids who are alive simply because they now see that they matter to people.” Participants frequently described relationships with youth that had an impact at the time of their involvement in the program. Furthermore, one participant also discussed the “retroactive” impact on youth who move on from the community and continue to express connectedness to those they met through Kaleidoscope Connect activities. The shared language that youth and adults can adopt as a result of the program was the reason why youth, specifically, were more able to identify their own ‘scissor cuts,” express the need for “anchors,” and build their “web” to support their own needs.

In reference to the “web” subtheme in the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum, participants discussed how vital the development of the web is for a youth’s success. Adults relayed the process of becoming a part of a youth’s web as being challenging at times due to mistrust, apprehension or interpersonal repair. As one participant described, “I have [a] student, who has addicted parents, disconnected from adults… and he is very familiar with the framework and the language. Last year, he came in at me and a co-teacher saying ‘taking my web and throwing it in the trash. See ya!’ complete with hand motions. At the end of the summer, he came back, and
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said he was going to go to boarding school, and that it’d been fun. A week later, we showed back up and said ‘Not going to boarding school. Going to stay here. I guess I need to apologize or something.’ And we have watched this student acknowledge the scissor cuts that he’s put into his web.” After explaining that this youth went on to make variably good choices throughout the year, they shared “… at the end of the year, he came in, he checked in with everyone and said, ‘I’m going fishing. I will be back in the fall, on time. I will be doing cross country. I will be clean. I will be sober, and I will make it through my senior year.’ And I gave him a hug, and he has called twice a week since to check in, to tell me how things are going. He’s repairing connections, and I said ‘Do you remember throwing the web in the trash?’ and he goes ‘Yeah, well, those damn strings!’ Discussions that included references to the “web” at times explored repair in relationships, integrating programmatic language, or were in the context of youth being apprehensive of making connections with adults outside of their immediate family.

Notably, the theme of the “web” also included discussions regarding adults feeling connected to one another, and how connection to other adults facilitates the emotional and interpersonal resources necessary to confront the ongoing challenges within these rural communities, and in sharing the burden of supporting at-risk youth. As one participant succinctly shared, “… we can’t do everything as a parent when we have two jobs, and going to school, and having four kids who are just out of foster care! So, I think that’s important too, for the parents. And for the parents to understand they have to be connected as well, and have it work.” Another participant discussed the importance of supportive adults and parents investing in relationship with other adults, and calling upon them when the time calls for more resources or skills than individual can give. This participant shared “Through the years, and learning about the web, the first thing that comes out of my mouth to parents when they’re saying ‘I don’t know what to do.”
[I ask] What other adults are connected to your child? Because were it not for the anchors in my children’s webs, I don’t always know that they would’ve made it through some of their trauma.” This participant went on to explain the importance of youth diversifying the adult supports in their lives, stating “[this program] teaches the kids, and it teaches the adults… to be able to say, you know what, maybe you need to talk to so and so, and they can help you with this. Because, being a parent that is an anchor in a child’s life, you’re not always the best solution at times.”

The diversification of the “web” for youth, according to one participant, also facilitates the insight about their own caregiver’s or other adult support’s limitations. One participant shared “We were at PHlight club, and we had just talked about anchors, and how some anchors have a greater capacity and more strengths, and some can only give one or two. And sometimes those one or two people are our parents, because our parents have struggles and challenges, but ask yourself ‘Did you have food? Did you have clothes? Did you have a home?’ And this young man came up and said ‘thank you, because tonight, for the first time, I realized my mom had value, because I never went hungry.’” This participant went on to explain why this experience may have been so impactful for this youth and others like him, sharing “that’s huge for healing. For a kid to be able to see all of the trauma, and see good in someone who may have caused him a lot of pain. It is super healing in that aspect too, from a shift change in how they view adults that many people would say shouldn’t be in their lives.” These results suggest that the quality of connections made in the web, as well as the diversification of connections made, support a youth’s resilience. Furthermore, participants shared that Kaleidoscope Connect helped youth acknowledge that one adult in their life may be able to offer support in one domain, while another person may have something different to offer, which helps the youth know how and why to diversify their connections with others.
In some cases, discussions referred to aspects of the youth’s lives that were unrelated to participation in Kaleidoscope Connect activities, but rather referred to factors that were already in place. Subthemes that described environmental and personal protective factors included cultural identity (referred 16 times, 11% of the Protective Factors discussion), wherein participants conveyed that youth’s cultural identity was protective, since it provided a sense of self to youth who valued their culture and allowed for natural relationships to form in their community. Additionally, the subtheme of religion (referenced eight times, 5% of the Protective Factors discussion) was also named as a protective factor, as youth who felt connected to their religious beliefs and practices were perceived by participants to be more resilient. Finally, some participants discussed internal characteristics (referred 3 times, 2% of the Protective Factors discussion), which included the attribution of personality characteristics to youth’s resilience against hardship, such as “she was just a strong girl” or “she was just like that, always determined”.

Results from the Protective Factors subthemes, and associated coverage, are summarized in the table below.
Figure 2

*Protective Factors Subtheme Summary of Coverage*

![Protective Factors Subtheme Coverage Diagram](image)

School Climate and Community Safety (referenced 71 times, 15% of total discussion across all focus groups). As we proposed to investigate in Research Question 2, each focus group was asked about how they perceive the Kaleidoscope Connect framework impacting or influencing the safety in their communities, as well as school climate. Since 60% of the focus group sample included participants who identified “teacher” as their profession, with others identifying as “staff” in schools, much of what was shared was relevant to the participants’ school communities. Emergent subthemes within this research question included cultural identity and meaning, school and community culture, language, isolation, and disconnectedness.

When participants referred to ideas or stories that included how peers and adults, or peers with other peers, interacted with one another in the school setting, it was coded under the subtheme of “school culture” *(referenced 23 times, 32% of the Community Safety and School Support from Adults)*.
Climate Discussion. In some instances, discussions explored the facilitation and promotion of the Kaleidoscope Connect program through peers making connections and sharing what they learned with one another. One participant shared how PHlight club positively affected a particular youth who continued to struggle with mental health problems (which this participant linked to the youth’s own traumatic background), but who supported his peers through encouragement and sharing the language of the framework. This participant indicated that through shared encouragement and support among youth, the school community is enhanced and the communities feel more connected. When reflecting upon the struggles of this youth, this participant stated “I don’t know if he considers me an anchor or not, but he checks in with me a lot. Not with so many words, it’s [quieter], like asking for ibuprofen for his back, when really there’s something else he wants to talk about. And he’s been to many PHlight clubs. I hear him encouraging others, even though he still struggles with that. He definitely encourages others to keep going, and he worries about others. He shares the language. He knows the language gives our kids hope, and he wants that for everyone.”

In describing the patterns of hardship that youth face in their community, the subtheme of community culture (referenced eight times, 11% of the Community Safety and School Climate discussion) was coded. Participants discussed how geographic isolation may impact school and community relationships, and these discussions were coded under the subtheme of “isolation and disconnectedness” (referenced four times, 6% of the Community Safety and School Climate discussion). One participant shared “…the has versus the have nots, where the kids are super important. They’re usually two parent families, both parents are employed. They have all the supports naturally occurred in their life. And then there’s the other neighborhood, where the children are raising themselves, and sometimes raising their parents, and this neighborhood
wants nothing to do with that neighborhood, and these kids are not allowed to go over there…the ones that are positive in the communities shut their doors, and the kids don’t see what they’re like.” Given the remote nature of their communities, participants reported that many youth are not exposed to families different from their own, highlighting a barrier to the expansion of youth’s “webs” to include new “anchors.” Participants expanded upon this reflection, sharing the idea that some youth who encounter unforgiving circumstances within their family or community, have not developed a frame of reference on what is “healthy and what is not.” A participant shared, referring to some youth in their rural community, “… their normal is seeing the drug use, the alcohol use, the abuse of mom, the abuse of children. That’s normal to them. They don’t understand that’s not okay, and so they don’t talk about it.”

One subtheme, particularly relevant to Native families, was the challenges associated with youth’s integration of their “cultural identity and meaning” (referred to 26 times, 37% of the Community Safety and School Climate discussion). Participants from both Alaska and Montana reflected upon the pain Native families have endured with regard to their “lost generation” of grandparents (and according to some participants, great grandparents) who “were taken away and sent to boarding schools… so they didn’t learn how to be parents.” Participants described that in many circumstances, substance abuse is not a factor, but rather intergenerational trauma, where the primary message is sometimes that those families need to abandon their culture to survive. One participant shared a youth’s experience when “her dad’s parents were taken away and sent to boarding school, and told that they couldn’t speak their language, they couldn’t practice their cultures. They came home, they raised children, so her dad was told ‘you check yourself at the door when you leave here… you assimilate with what you’re seeing out there.’” Participants shared that the Kaleidoscope Connect framework can and does contribute to the
revitalization of culture and language through enhancing connection between Native youth and elders in their community, whose mission is to preserve their culture. In contrast, another participant shared that it is this intergenerational trauma that contributes to some elders in Native communities feeling more reluctant to become involved in youth’s school activities, including the Kaleidoscope Connect program, because of their own experiences and trauma related to boarding school experiences, and a lack of trust in organizations that were not developed within their cultural milieu.

Furthermore, one participant discussed the occasional overreliance upon schools to provide structure and resources for youth, particularly for those children of families who have been affected by the trauma of boarding school, and who therefore are weary of school involvement. The participant shared “… schools now are responsible for so much of the day. You know, before school activities, breakfast, the whole school day, after school activities, and some communities do dinner, because parents don’t have it [referring to food insecurity]. There’s not time that’s expected for them to parent, so then what happens the kids get inundated with programs, and activities, and things to do so much, that when they graduate from high school, it is absolute… they go searching for things to do, and then they get drugs and alcohol, or whatever other destructive behavior… then when they have their own babies, they have no idea how to parent, because they were parented by a school.” This testimony reflects the effect of isolation and intergenerational trauma upon parenting and family structure, and may also allude to a potential barrier to the implementation of Kaleidoscope Connect program.

Participants also described the power of the Kaleidoscope Connect program and the effect it can have upon a school and the general community. Referring to a community in rural Alaska that is generally perceived to have high social disconnection, since residents are
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geographically dispersed across the region and therefore have little interaction with one another, a participant stated “…the school is like, polar opposite from that because the two lead teachers there are amazing. They bleed full color, they have done an amazing job of making all of a school community with traditions and with culture through PHlight club.” Participants who identified as teachers and community leaders named incorporating the subtheme of “language” (referenced 10 times, 14% of the Community Safety and School Climate discussion), such as “seeing full color” or “building a web,” as a vital part of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework’s effect upon the communities in which it is implemented, as it provides a collective language for both adults and youth to talk about difficult experiences in a trauma-sensitive way, that is both unifying and collectively understood.

Expanding upon the unique nature of small, rural Montana towns and Native Alaskan villages, participants provided a clear image of what may be protective about the tight knit communities where children are raised, and how the Kaleidoscope Connect program can build upon this strength to enhance a youth’s life. One participant shared, with regard to raising her children in a village community, “I look back and I think about how blessed I was…I always had someone, I always had someone to help me with my kids. I had elders in the community that I could go to ask for advice on anything I needed. And I had friends that were raising kids that were the same age as my kids and I had that connectedness. And I always knew I had somebody looking out for my kids and my kids knew I had people looking out for my kids… there was a natural web that was built in community for my children.” Participants reflected upon how living in a small community cultivated more opportunity for connectedness that the Kaleidoscope Connect intervention can enhance. When exploring the differences between urban and rural communities, after moving to a more heavily populated area in Alaska, one participant shared
“one of the first things I noticed was the behaviors of the kids, and the disrespect for adults… I will hear a kid using foul language, and I would say, would you say that to your grandma? And wow. The way they talk to me.” This participant shared that what she encountered would have never occurred in her previous village community. She then further explained that the need of children in her new urban community “to have that web of support is so strong and they just don’t have it.” Participants generally expressed agreement that the nature of small and rural communities makes an ideal environment to implement programs that aim to enhance connection between youth and adults, and that this need expands beyond these small communities to more populated and urban areas.

The results of the *School Climate and Community Safety* subthemes, and associated coverage, are summarized in the figure below.

**Figure 3**

*School Climate and Community Safety Subthemes Summary of Coverage*
**Feasibility (referenced 110 times, 24% of total discussions across all groups).**

Participants were asked to discuss their impressions of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework and its associated activities with respect to its accessibility and feasibility. Conversations were included for analysis that discussed how the Brightways Learning organization creates a sense of community and mission-orientation that contributes to consumers of its programs being more likely to embrace and advocate for its dissemination and adoption. The subthemes identified within the Feasibility conversation included perceived value, Brightways relationships, barriers to dissemination, and integrity and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs.

Participants conveyed a high level of “perceived value” (this subtheme was referenced 51 times, 46% of the Feasibility discussion) upon the Kaleidoscope Connect activities in general, sharing that over the years, the changes in flexibility and format have become increasingly easier to make. Furthermore, participants also referenced the increase of “social emotional learning (SEL)” (subtheme referenced 10 times, 9% of the Feasibility discussion) initiatives in their schools and communities, which was appreciated among all focus groups. One participant shared, and others agreed, that “everybody is talking about [SEL initiatives], but Brightways Learning is the only program that I’ve looked at that puts the power into the kids’ hands.” At least one participant in each focus group shared that there isn’t a need for a change to Kaleidoscope Connect’s implementation, since it is, as one participant put it, “simple, but comprehensive. You can throw almost anything at me, and I can find a way to work it into the framework somewhere.”

An important aspect of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework that was addressed in all focus groups is the degree to which the program serves youth who later return to be leaders in
their community, or in the dissemination of Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum. Participants shared that those communities who witness a youth’s participation, later success, and subsequent return to serve that community in a meaningful way as a young adult, is a vital ingredient to increase the perceived value of the curriculum and feasibility. One participant shared “our kids want to be involved” after seeing family member or peer involvement. Another stated “the leaders in the communities that I remember when they were 10 years old are now coming to our [Resilient Educator and Kaleidoscope Academy] trainings, because they’ve been going to PHlight club for years, and they believe in it.” The interconnected nature of some communities, and the networking that occurs as a result of youth’s participation in the program appear to, from the perspective of participants, strengthen the impression and perceived value of the program, since more members in a community may endorse it wholeheartedly. Many youth, as described by several participants, see PHlight club as being a part of the culture of junior and senior high school students, so younger students “can’t wait until they’re old enough to be able to go to PHlight club.” The observation by younger students of older students participating and adopting the language of PHlight club is, in part, what amplifies the desire and attention the program receives from the community. Participants agreed that when youth participate and go on to hold impactful roles in their communities, younger children and families tend to pay closer attention and want to be a part of the process. One participant, who identified their profession as a teacher, described her relationship with a male identifying youth who was raised in her Alaskan village. This youth participated in PHlight Club as a young man, left the community after high school, and recently returned to step into a highly important and respected role. The participant shared “He’s a chief for goodness sakes. He’s a chief of his village, and the youngest chief ever. He grew up in PHlight Club, and he has such an impact and he still makes time to come to PHlight
Clubs because he sees how valuable they are, and there’s nothing more powerful. There’s nothing more powerful than those young men who stand up at PHlight Club and talk.” In expanding upon this discussion, participants discussed the youth-led aspects of the Kaleidoscope Connect framework as the defining feature of its feasibility and accessibility. Participants shared “We just need to leave. Leave it there. We can be like the PHlight club grandparents. Let them lead.” The youth led nature of the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum emerged as one of the most valued aspects of the framework, leading to more accessibility and making the program in general more feasible for the communities it serves.

The subtheme of “Brightways relationships” (referred 22 times, 20% of the Feasibility discussion) played an important role when discussing the feasibility of implementing Kaleidoscope Connect program. The organization of Brightways Learning garnered positive support from participants, and particularly focused on the organization’s relationships with their stakeholders. As one participant stated, “I always feel super respected and super included in their trainings. Like, they say every single time, ‘you guys are the experts and we’re learning from you.’” Participants also noted how the organization acknowledges that the adults who are implementing and disseminating the programs know their communities best, and to meet the goal of proving accessible and culturally responsive programing, Brightways Learning and their team members are “constantly picking each other’s brains…and it’s that back and forth of intelligence sharing that is so powerful.” Related to the “Brightways relationships” subtheme was the subtheme of “integrity” (referred 10 times, 9% of the Feasibility discussion), suggesting that those aiming to disseminate Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum and lessons are “practicing what they preach. They live it, and I feel it every time I’m here and with them.” Every focus group’s participants endorsed believing in the mission of Brightways Learning, often referencing how
“we believe in it,” with two participants stating that they had been involved in Kaleidoscope Connect framework dissemination for between seven and ten years.

The subtheme of “barriers to dissemination” (referred to 17 times, 15% of the Feasibility discussion) of Kaleidoscope Connect program named by participants included expressing concern and interest in increasing acceptance and support from administrative personnel and teachers within schools and communities. One participant shared that one aspect of the program that would increase feasibility and accessibility is by increasing the community’s perception of ownership of it, as they stated “If it was ran in a house owned by someone [in my community], where we had ownership of it, instead of some places where you bring people in.”

A concern that was addressed with regard to feasibility was the demand for time with youth, and organizing events and curriculum in such a way that is openly accepted by the communities Kaleidoscope Connect attempts to serve. A participant, who identified as a teacher and who was referring to the typical format of PHlight club, shared that there are “challenges with getting three days and two nights in communities. We have had trouble with getting those blocks of times to spend with kids.” Another participant shared “over the last seven years or so, we’ve tried a bunch of different kinds of delivery models. We’ve tried evening session. We’ve tried Fridays. We’re going to do a 9:00 to 2:15. I’m calling them mini PHlight clubs… it’s kind of an introductory [activity].” Participants expanded upon this observation, comparing the need for flexibly delivering Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum to the need to recognize the current functioning of youth who participates and adjustments are made accordingly. One participant shared “It’s like meeting a kid where they are,” when referring to the constraints the youth’s families and communities have in accommodating the time needs of the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum.
One participant praised the design of the activities in the curriculum, which recognizes that the community in which the activity is being implemented has unique circumstances and resources. That participant shared “Brightways Learning does such a good job so that [communities] who have their own challenges can receive the program or that the information is so flexible. We can say ‘we can’t do three days, two nights, so we’ll do two days and one night. We’ll do an afternoon. Let’s just start.”

Similar to the issue of time is the need for an organized dissemination of the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum that is system-, or community-wide. Participants discussed the barrier of implementing and teaching the curriculum and its framework in the school setting. In particular, several participants expressed implementation concerns in places where the administration of the school was not fully engaged in the activities. One individual, who shared that they work for a single school district in differing locations in Alaska, stated “[some] students don’t have access to it from a district perspective. I mean, I teach the lessons and talk about it, but it’s not systematic in any way. It’s just me.” Participants discussed that, because of the complexity and comprehensiveness of the program, it is not possible to explain it to someone (an administrator or a student, for example) in 20 minutes or less, so where there is less understanding, there is less buy-in, and therefore less systematic dissemination that allows the framework to have a broad impact. Another participant described how having an immersive weekend (like that utilized for PHlight Club) in a small, village setting is easily arranged from an administrative perspective, but larger districts present more barriers to the organization and facilitation of times and resources to support the intervention. For example, regarding hosting PHlight Club in a small village, one participant said “… for PHlight club, the length of the long weekend works really, really well within the village because it’s so simple to adjust your
schedule in a small school. The principal can just make the decision that we’re going to start on a
Thursday night, and we’re not going to have school on Friday.” Participants discussed the
challenge of having the same format in a larger district, suggesting that a different format that
“recreates” the experience of PHlight club in an urban setting is needed.

The results of the *Feasibility* and subthemes coverage is summarized in the figure below.

**Figure 4**

*Feasibility Subthemes Summary of Coverage*
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The aim of this project was to evaluate the perceived value and influence, as well as the feasibility, of the dissemination and implementation of the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum and its associated activities, from the perspective of involved adults. The researcher pursued the exploration of these research questions through the use of primarily qualitative methods, with quantitative methods used to deepen conclusions drawn during focus group interviews, as well as to provide demographic and other descriptive information of the sample. The survey, which included both quantitative (e.g., Likert scale questions and multiple-choice responses) and several qualitative (e.g., open-ended questions and lists) methods of gathering information about the primary research questions, was created and employed by the researcher. The focus groups were simultaneously conducted alongside the survey, obtaining rich audio recordings that were analyzed qualitatively for relevant and meaningful themes. The data collected provided a comprehensive picture of how participants perceive the effect of the Kaleidoscope Connect Curriculum across several domains, including its influence upon resilience, suicide (and suicide’s prevention), school climate, community safety, and the overall framework’s acceptance and endorsement among the communities it is designed to support.

Overall, all participants (n = 15) of the focus groups endorsed strong support and beliefs that the program enhanced youth’s lives across all domains. In contrast, the survey data (n = 56), which captured a wider range of perspectives of the program’s effectiveness in these domains, provided results that suggested a mixed endorsement of the program (though generally, the endorsement of the program’s effectiveness is still considered strong).
Implications

The current study employed an empirical design that was primarily reliant upon the rich qualitative data derived from focus group interviews, which were analyzed by the qualitative methods of open, axial and selective coding, embodying an inductive analysis strategy to content analysis. The researcher then included the implementation of survey data to expand upon and further strengthen conclusions drawn from the focus group interviews. As the survey data captures a larger range of perspectives, and not just those who volunteered for participation in the focus groups (who are presumably strong advocates of the program’s implementation), its inclusion aimed to provide endorsements of support and criticism of the program overall. Conclusions drawn from the integration of both of these sources of data are described below, in specific reference to the primary research questions of this study.

Resilience

Our first research question explored the degree to which the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum supported the aim of increasing resilience among youth, as perceived by adult participants. This particular aim was measured by the assessment of how the Kaleidoscope Connect program increases closeness between youth and adults in their community. Closeness between youth and adults is cited by the literature (Akiba, 2008; Akiba, 2010; Pisano et al., 2013; Sarkova et al., 2014) to greatly increase a youth’s resilience against numerous and negative life outcomes. Another way in which the researcher conceptualized the promotion of resilience among youth, from adult perspectives, was the degree to which participants felt the program, and its specific components, worked to mitigate the prevalence of suicidality among youth.
Among the most robust findings throughout the study was the observation that the overwhelming majority of participants suggested that the program increases connection between adults and youth from their communities. Given the extensive body of literature that suggests the importance of youth-adult connection in promoting resilience (Pisani, et al, 2013; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), this is a pivotal finding. According to the survey data, respondents felt strongly about the program’s effectiveness in increasing connection between youth and adults, as demonstrated by participants having endorsed an average score of 8.16 (on a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 suggesting that the program does not strengthen connection between adults, and with 10 being it significantly strengthens connection with adults). These findings suggest that most participants believe that the program has enhanced their own relationship with youth in their communities. A similar theme was reflected in the focus group interviews, wherein participants described developing ongoing connections with youth who have attended a Kaleidoscope Connect program, which was most often (88% of survey respondents, and 100% of focus group attendees) participation in PHlight club. These endorsements, taken together, suggest that community members and participants view the program as valuable with respect to supporting youth-adult connections, which is vital to its continued implementation and investment.

Research suggests that strong youth-adult connections may buffer against the presence of risk factors that may threaten a youth’s well-being and resilience (Pisani, 2013). Given the strong perception most participants conveyed with regard to the program’s ability to strengthen connections between youth and adults in their community, the Kaleidoscope Connect program is perceived to achieve its goal in strengthening these youth-adult relationships. Participants in focus groups discussed in depth their relationships with youth who had many risk factors, such as
the participants who shared being called upon by youth in their most distressed moments to support them, and then later learning their support to that youth was “life-saving.”

Among the most important findings in this study was that of the risk factors that are present in a youth’s lives, as youth in rural areas who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, family violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues (present in themselves and their family) mirror those risk factors that were mitigated by adult-youth connections in the literature. Studies that convey this message are numerous, including findings that suggest connecting youth with stable adults in their community can be transformational, as these relationships are a key protective factor for marginalized youth (Ungar, 2013). Importantly, among this sample, 20% of participants identified as minorities themselves, and many reported working in villages or towns where a large proportion of youth also identify as a minority, including Native Alaskan, Native American, and Latinx. This finding suggests that the approach of the Kaleidoscope Connect program is an effective way of promoting connection between youth and adults, and may be particularly useful for minority and marginalized youth.

Similarly, other research suggests that an adolescent’s sense of connectedness to caring adults acts as a protective factor against a number of risk-taking behaviors and environmental risk factors (Schilling et al., 2016). To understand the effect of the Kaleidoscope Connect program’s aim to increase connectedness among communities, the present study examined the risk-taking behaviors and environmental risk factors present in youth’s lives and asked participants to reflect upon how the program may buffer against negative outcomes associated with these issues. Participants reported being knowledgeable of a wide variety of risk factors that were present in youth’s lives that reflect the general trends of Alaska and Montana, which are discussed in more detail below. These risk factors and behaviors included alcohol and other
substance use (among youth themselves and their family members), mental health issues, poverty and homelessness, domestic violence, isolation, and community violence. The nature of risk factors listed by participants, and the degree to which participants observed them, mirrored publicly accessible health data in their respective communities. According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Division of Public Health, who administers the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) every two years to public and private high schools across the state, over the past 30 days, 21% had drank alcohol, 22% had used cannabis, 4% had used cocaine, 4% had used ecstasy, 2% had used methamphetamine, and 2% had used heroine. Patterns of drug use endorsement were similar in Montana (with the exception of alcohol use, which was significantly higher than in Alaska), over the past 30 days, 33% of high school students had a drink of alcohol, and 21% had used cannabis. The YRBSS in Montana assesses lifetime use only of the other drugs discussed above, with respondents’ percentages of lifetime use as follows: 4% had tried cocaine, 4% had tried ecstasy, 2% had used heroin, and 2% had tried methamphetamine. Given that participants frequently cited drug use and substance abuse problems as a common risk factors (cited by 36% of the survey sample, 50% of which named alcohol explicitly as their most prominent concern), the perception that the program promotes resilience through strengthening youth-adult relations extremely effectively by participants, may support its use in potentially mitigating drug use among youth. Extensive research shows that drug use across all discussed substance types, and particularly with alcohol use, can be reduced through more frequent and stronger connections between youth and adults outside of their immediate family (Chris, Smith, Morris, Liu & Hubbard, 2017).

Furthermore, according the 2019 YRBSS report, only 48% of youth in 9th through 12th grade, endorsed “feeling comfortable seeking help from three or more adults other besides their
parents if they had an important question affecting their life.” Participants discussed the Kaleidoscope Connect program’s effectiveness in supporting youth to forge new connections with adults, and begin to develop connections that are strong and reliable. As one participant stated about one of the youth, “she began to learn that she can build her web, and lean into it when she needs to… and that it’s ok to need more support at times.” Participants referenced support from adults (referenced 60 times), “web” concept (referenced 22 times), and the “anchor” concept (referenced 10 times) when discussing the program’s aim to increase youth’s quality and number of connections. The action of participants integrating the language of the program into the interviews and survey responses suggests that the theme of increasing connection is felt strongly by all participants, and that adopting the language helped participants demonstrate the program’s effectiveness. Similarly, participants shared that having the language to discuss the number and quality of their connections to adults is vital for youth’s experience and progress, as it provides youth and adult participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences using a common language.

When asked about their perceptions of suicidality among the youth in their communities, participants reflected upon the negative effect and presence of suicidality amongst those they care for and know. Of the survey respondents, 48% had known a youth in their community who had attempted suicide in the past 12 months, and 30% had known a youth who died by suicide in the same time frame. Of the focus group participants, all (n =15) had been affected by suicide or suicidality in youth, each of them personally knowing at least one youth, or knowing of at least one youth in their community, who died by suicide. These findings reflect the devastating picture the YRBSS reports provide for both Alaska and Montana from 2017-2019. In 2019 in Alaska, a staggering 20% of youth reported attempting suicide over the past 12 months, with 25% of youth
reported “seriously considering” suicide. The suicide completion rate in 2019 in Alaska was approximately 29 per 100,000 residents, with 36% of those deaths occurring in youth 19 years old or younger. In 2019 in Montana, 10% of youth reported attempting suicide over the past 12 months, with 23% of youth reporting that they “seriously considered” suicide. The suicide completion rate in 2019 in Montana was approximately 27 per 100,000 residents, with 41% of those deaths occurring in Youth 18 years old or younger. Given these bleak statistics, the finding that participants believed the Kaleidoscope Connect program is *moderately to extremely* effective in preventing suicide among youth is an important endorsement. It is clear that youth residents of Alaska and Montana currently and historically have struggled with higher rates of depressive symptomology and suicidality than youth in many other areas of the United States. Consequently, the identification of an SEL program that addresses this crisis is an invaluable resource. Furthermore, the program itself is not only perceived to enhance connection between youth and adults, but its focus of increasing connection has been demonstrated in the literature to effectively prevent suicide among youth (Pisani et al., 2013; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

With respect to protective factors, participants shared that youth who are well-connected to the adults in their community, or those who are working to cultivate connections with adults, are more resilient. Research shows that the quality of interactions between adults and students, including in the school setting (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman & Curby, 2017), moderates the effectiveness of social emotional learning programs, irrespective of their specific curriculum. The current study’s findings suggest that as a result of the program, adults are more connected to the youth in their communities. This increased closeness may inherently include higher quality interactions, which can increase a youth’s investment in the Kaleidoscope Connect program and the adult’s perception that the program is effective in achieving its goals. As the Kaleidoscope
Connect program emphasizes identifying “anchors” and strengthening their “web” by engaging in reciprocal relationships (captured by the *Indigo Phactor*, referred to as “caring for the carers”), the program capitalizes on the opportunity to both increase investment among its participants (both adults and youth alike) and the increased effectiveness of SEL programs associated with positive and strong interactions.

**School Climate and Community Safety**

Survey responses indicated that participants in the Kaleidoscope Connect program felt the curriculum is *moderately to extremely* helpful in promoting community safety and enhancing school climate. The focus groups reiterated this sentiment, where much of the discussion was centered upon the cultural factors and geographic characteristics of many of the participant’s communities. Reflections provided by participants regarding community safety and school cultural often related to cultural identity and meaning (*referenced 26 times*), both in terms of how these aspects of a youth’s lives may be protective or may act as barriers to a youth’s overall well-being. One participant discussed how the nature of living in a small community facilitated a natural web of adults from whom children can lean. Other participants discussed the value of their cultural traditions in supporting youth’s sense of identity and place in the world, which they felt was protective. Importantly, Native communities are incredibly diverse, and therefore many of the reflections provided by participants should be interpreted as being based on their experiences and knowledge, which will not always reflect all Native communities or other individuals. On the other hand, although Native tribes hold diverse beliefs, there are some commonalities that are shared among many communities, including those that were represented in this study. One such belief expressed by some participants was that the sacredness of children and their overall health was central to the health of the community itself. In many Native
communities, children are raised within a “tight-knit” network of kin and extended kin, which is often accompanied by a sense of pride and protection for youth (Sarche & Whitesell, 2012). Research shows that youth who have a strong sense of cultural identity, and Alaska Native youth in particular, are less likely to suffer from alcohol problems (Hazel & Mohatt, 2001), suicidality (Allen, Mohatt, Fox, Henry & The People Awakening Team, 2009), and have an easier recovery from substance use disorders (Gone, 2009). Yup’ik community members who identify an awareness of their own connectedness with family, community and their natural environment experience these protections (Mohatt, Fok, Murket, Henry & Allen, 2011). The idea of being familiar with one’s connectedness is held in the Yup’ik concept of “Ellam-iinga,” which means “the eye of awareness” and the term “Yuuyaraq,” meaning “the way of the human being,” which embodies the belief that living in harmony with the natural environment (such as the land, water, heavens, animals, people and plants) is the key to spiritual health and overall well-being (Mohatt, Fok, Murket, Henry & Allen, 2011). Participants in the current study echoed this sentiment, conveying that the youth in their community and in their schools represent that identity and health of the community as a whole.

In the context of Native families specifically, the discussion of cultural identity also extended into the pain of intergenerational and secondary trauma. Participants shared that many of the youth they knew encountered these experiences through their own grandparents or parents, as well as extended kin, siblings, and friends. With respect to the dissemination of the Kaleidoscope Connect program and its goal in forging new, strong connections among its participants, the presence of historical, traumatic experiences pose a barrier to widespread adoption of the framework. For instance, focus group members shared the trauma of youth’s grandparent’s (and other family members) by describing their experiences in missionary
boarding schools. The experiences of elders in the community often sowed doubt and mistrust in school systems among family members and family systems. As Kaleidoscope Connect program are in part, depending upon the area, disseminated through school systems and districts (as with PHlight clubs and curriculum integration), participants described the effect of Native family involvement in SEL curriculum, including Kaleidoscope Connect. Participants also described how the lack of ownership of the program itself, which will be later discussed in more detail, may impede the buy-in of a program that attempts to address the disconnection that may occur due to intergenerational trauma. Research demonstrates that Alaska Native/American Indian youth are more likely to experience trauma in general and engage in high-risk behaviors, including those discussed in this paper. Furthermore, researchers speculate that many of these disparities are rooted in the AN/AI population’s history of colonization of Indigenous people, and as previously discussed, the transgenerational effects of involuntary suppression of cultural philosophies and practices (Garcia, 2020). As one participant described, a youth they knew had been told by her father to “check your identity at the door,” with the expectation that assimilation is the best way to survive and thrive in a colonized world. Unsurprisingly, these experiences have had lasting effects on both the community’s culture and school climate, with a warranted apprehension of Native families becoming involved in systems in which they may not perceive to be a member with influence or a voice. This revelation by participants underscores the ongoing effects of trauma that occurs currently and historically, and highlights ways in which Kaleidoscope Connect can strengthen the program’s dissemination through ongoing partnership and advocacy by inviting all community members to become involved at each level (from participation in the program to administrative roles). One study suggests that the most effective strategies at preventing suicide among Alaska Native/Native American youth is intergenerational
engagement and cultural connectedness (Doria, Momper & Burrage, 2021), which calls attention to what participants’ shared as a concern for many youth experiencing the full benefits of Kaleidoscope Connect if they are among a family affected by these experiences.

Many families in both Alaska and Montana live in isolated areas, and participants addressed this fact as a barrier to community connectedness, which is inherently related to community safety. One participant indicated that in their community, there is no “main street” or “gathering” place, which maintains a culture of disconnectedness and isolation (referenced eight times). Participants discussed that youth may suffer from this geographic disconnection, as it interrupts their exposure to other families and other lifestyles, and ultimately interferes with the youth’s ability to build a strong “web.” The dissemination of the Kaleidoscope Connect program provides a centralized resource for youth who may be living in dispersed communities, and may facilitate the meeting of adults outside their families that may not otherwise occur. Participants shared that youth and adults who have not been aware of their proximity before attending a PHlight Club have forged strong bonds with one another, and experienced tremendous benefits from having made this connection to a person close to their home. Generally, participants in this study viewed the Kaleidoscope Connect program as a buffer against the presence of geographic isolation, bringing together communities more effectively than, for example, school or church involvement.

School climate was of concern to participants, since up to 60% of the overall sample identified working in the school system (as a teacher, counselor, administrator or another valued role). When participants shared their impression of the Kaleidoscope Connect program’s effect upon the school climate, they discussed the effect of peer adoption of the program’s language and philosophy. One participant described that even those youth who endorsed high levels of
psychological distress were driven to share the language and ideas taught by the Kaleidoscope Connect program with others who were struggling, highlighting their own belief in the framework’s power. In one school where a focus group member worked, access to Kaleidoscope Connect occurred when a student was an “upper classman,” which tended to create a desire in “lower classman” to be an “upper classman,” so they could attend PHlight club. The social value among peers appears to strongly influence buy-in among youth, and in the literature, a similar trend is reflected. As youth enter into adolescence, their motivation in social development naturally turns toward their peer group, who begin to take on increasingly impressionable and supportive roles (Small and Covalt, 2006). Research has shown that interventions where peer-to-peer mentorship is emphasized, the quality of youth’s engagement (among adolescents, specifically) improves (January et al., 2016). Furthermore, peer-to-peer mentorship is considered a trauma-informed approach to SEL programs, since it places the power of choice in the youth’s hands (January et al., 2016).

Feasibility

The majority of survey respondents and focus group participants provided responses that suggested an overall positive experience with the Kaleidoscope Connect program with respect to the domains assessed by the current study. The perceived value (referenced 51 times) of the Kaleidoscope Connect curriculum included positive statements of support for the program, including appreciation of the overall program’s flexibility, as communicated by one statement where a participant shared that “the program is so flexible, so it’s easily implemented.” Given the various contexts that the Kaleidoscope Connect framework is taught and shared, this particular observation captured a strength of the delivery strategies used that has made the program highly feasible. A participant who identified as a teacher shared that “however much
time I have, I can do 15 minutes of a lesson, or I can do an hour, and that is so helpful.” The flexibility of the program itself appears to facilitate buy-in from adult participants, and has carried the program through, as it has been continually adapted to appropriately fit the time and resources of the individuals who are disseminating. This is an important finding, as the perception of flexibility among participants and individuals involved in the dissemination of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program (referenced 10 times) has been shown to be a strong predictor of stakeholder’s buy-in (Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee & Svistova, 2018).

Participants viewed the program to be “simple but comprehensive” as one participant stated, sharing that no matter what time or resource constraint may emerge in their work setting or community, the program is flexible enough to be adapted to suit its audience appropriately and effectively. Interestingly, some research shows that SEL programs that utilize an integrated, daily approach to message and framework delivery overtime can increase value and be more effective (and efficient) than curricula that is taught during structured lesson blocks, often referred to as “kernels” of learning (Embry & Biglan, 2008). As the Kaleidoscope Connect framework can be delivered in both manners, this is a particular strength of the program, for which participants in this study expressed gratitude.

Participants also communicated their value of the program by providing stories of youth with whom they are close whose lives were profoundly affected by the framework. As one participant shared about a struggling youth with whom she was connected “she speaks the language, she knows, and she credits her survival, her way of coping, to Kaleidoscope Connect-the framework, completely.” This example is one of many that communicates how profoundly influential participants felt the program was, and particularly those who participated in the focus groups, in providing youth connections, language and support when they are in need or crisis.
This observation appeared to be tied to the program’s feasibility at times, since participants often linked its flexibility and simplicity to its effectiveness. As one participant shared, “kids don’t have to come for the entire weekend [referring to PHlight club] to get something powerful out of it.”

One participant provided insight about how youth, who are well-connected as a result of their participation in Kaleidoscope Connect, strengthen public perceptions of the program among community members and participants. The story explored how some youth, who have participated in one of the components of Kaleidoscope Connect, will leave the community and ultimately return to serve the community in a meaningful way. Often, those youth who fit that description still promote and are, in some cases, involved in ongoing efforts to disseminate the Kaleidoscope Connect framework. As community leaders, those former Kaleidoscope Connect participants tend to increase the buy-in of other community members who may have otherwise not been exposed to the framework or its power. Participants discussed the observation that, as young adults who have found success (such as financial stability, assuming leadership roles and maintaining strong connections with other community members), younger community members look to their older counterparts and become inspired by their success. Another participant shared that a similar effect occurs in schools, when younger students are influenced by their older student counterparts, and greatly anticipated being eligible to participate in the Kaleidoscope Connect program. Peer to peer influence can have a compelling effect upon levels of investment among participants of SEL programs, as evidenced by one study that showed that peer acceptance and engagement of a school activity increased the motivation and success of other peers who were connected to that individual through friendship or frequent interaction (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016).
Similarly, participants generally shared positive impressions of those individuals who facilitate the dissemination of Kaleidoscope Connect program, which includes primarily members of the Brightways Learning Organization (referred to 22 times). Participants listed on the survey and discussed within the focus group feeling “heard by Brightways Learning people” and shared that they “felt understood.” Participants shared that they had an experience with Brightways Learning that cultivated trust and encouraged a sense of reverence for their personal experiences, insights, and relationships. This finding is vital in understanding the strengths of the framework’s dissemination, as it highlights the ways in which the program is already increasing investment among its stakeholders, and establishes novel paths of increasing positive perception of Kaleidoscope Connect. This reflection by participants embodies a necessary condition for Community-Based participatory research (CBPR), which according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), is defined as “a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issues being studied, representatives of organizations and researchers in all aspects of the research process to improve health and well-being through taking action, including social change” (AHRQ, 2009).

Though the Kaleidoscope Connect program is not formally a research initiative, they collect data to support program evaluation. The program’s aim is to work alongside communities and families, much like CBPR, to address the profound effect of mental health and behavioral struggles among youth in rural and indigenous areas.

When participants were asked about the feasibility of the program, many named barriers to dissemination (referred to 17 times), which included challenges associated with engaging administrators of school (and other) systems and a lack of shared knowledge of the program’s effects with teachers and other stakeholders within a given community. Participants stressed that
to increase buy-in among community members and youth, widespread awareness of the program’s goals and framework is essential, particularly among school administrators. One participant described that just a short introduction of the framework, as well as its aims and effectiveness, is enough to catch the attention of many individuals who are in positions of influence. This observation could provide further guidance as to how dissemination may be influenced by advertising, or community representatives, in increasing feasibility and buy-in. Awareness of the program’s effectiveness could increase access to necessary resources and time that would facilitate the program’s dissemination. Furthermore, ownership of the program’s implementation by community members was also discussed as a barrier to the program’s dissemination. As previously indicated, many youth and families who participate in Kaleidoscope Connect experience intergenerational and secondary trauma. These painful experiences are tied to school or other public systems and leave some participants apprehensive and mistrusting of engagement in a program that is provided by a similar type of system. For this reason, participants suggested that passing ownership to community members of the program could be instrumental in overcoming barriers associated with trust and a signal of respecting and honoring cultural values. This finding is consistent with CBPR’s philosophy, which aims to support the challenges encountered by communities by partnering with community groups and leaders to ensure that cultural and local perspectives are recognized and honored (AHRQ, 2009). Some scholars argue that CBPR can fall short of working to decolonize its research and intervention approaches, allowing Eurocentric conceptualizations of inquiry and community interventions to be perpetuated, often without awareness (Scanton, 2014). In some cases, researchers, educators and clinicians can uphold systems of hierarchy and control of indigenous communities by privileging structured service delivery and fidelity over reciprocity (Scanton,
To decolonize research and intervention endeavors, such as those carried out Brightways Learning, providers must engage in the active “deconstruction of assimilative, deculturizing practices in Native communities and schools” (Smith, 1999). Furthermore, allowing more deciding and hosting powers to be held by community members, and particularly by Native and minority community members (such as the suggestion by one participant that a locally owned home could host PHlight club) is also trauma-informed. Research shows that communities who have experienced significant trauma can benefit from choosing for themselves when, where, and how intervention and research endeavors occur, which ultimately increases the effectiveness of these endeavors and minimizes the risk of further harm (Mihn, Patel, Bruce-Barrett & O’Campo, 2015).

**Strengths and Limitations**

This qualitative study has several strengths. This approach to conducting research allowed for the clarification of ideas and deepening understanding without losing complexity and content (Patton, 2015). These methods provided a voice to participants that can deepen the connection between the quantitative methods endorsed by participants (surveys) and ensured that the answers were founded in the respondents’ experiences. This approach allowed for greater flexibility in exploring the benefits of a small intervention program that cannot be appropriately examined statistically due to a small sample size. The approach deepened the understanding of the participants’ experiences in Kaleidoscope Connect without comprising data integrity due to small statistical cells sizes. Finally, the utilization of a qualitative approach and supplemental understanding with descriptive statistics mirrored the way in which individuals collect information about one another naturally. In conversations about their experiences in the program,
descriptive (story-telling) and analytic (number of hours attended) data contributed to a more comprehensive picture of adult perspectives.

Furthermore, qualitative research is often more complicated to analyze, as the approach requires an in-depth exploration of the available data without specific hypotheses in mind. This projected required an expansion of the researcher’s data collection expertise, and necessitated several members of the research team to contribute their experience to assure a methodologically sound endeavor. The current study also required more intensive resources, as the method of data collection demanded different materials and time commitments to participants. According to Patton (2015), the integration of qualitative data methods is often criticized from an academic perspective as being less rigorous. However, the use of the research for program design and implementation is highly useful and benefits real-world applications more readily than basic research, which tends to be more highly valued among scholars (Patton, 2015). The importance of qualitative research for studies with smaller sample sizes is undeniable, as it helps form a foundation of knowledge for interventions that promotes the appropriate and efficient use of often already limited resources.

Despite these strengths, this study also has its limitations. The limited diversity of perspectives captured in the study’s sample limits the generalization of the results. The aim of this study was to understand the degree to which participants and disseminators of the program believe it is effective across certain domains, therefore requiring the participants to have returned to the program (suggesting an inherent level of investment and positive regard for the program). It is clear that those adults who participated in Kaleidoscope Connect and did not feel it was effective may have not returned. Therefore, we were not able to obtain their perspectives regarding the program’s effectiveness. These critical perspectives would have enhanced the
understanding of this research in terms of establishing what may not be working well, as well as what could be changed to increase feasibility. The researcher attempted to address this issue by distributing the survey link to past attendees through an email list provided by Brightways Learning, which presumably included adults who had only participated in Kaleidoscope Connect one time and chose to not return. However, the data suggest that a much small percentage of participants (across all survey responses, 15%) rated the program’s effectiveness below moderate across the domains assessed, suggesting that the vast majority of participants were invested in the program and felt it was highly effective.

The perspectives evaluated in this study were examined both by survey and focus group interview. These perspectives do not include outcome variables that could support the effectiveness of the program’s curriculum as a whole. In that sense, this study is a face validity study, which is relevant to increasing investment and buy-in among the communities it is intended to serve, but is not demonstrative of the program’s ability to achieve its goals. Future research could integrate this limitation, therefore providing information about the perceived value of Kaleidoscope Connect and how it affects health and other important outcomes.

Finally, the researcher conducted the focus group interviews and surveys from a distance through technological means. The absence of the researcher in the presence of participants could be a limitation in facilitating increased vulnerability among participants with respect to what they shared. Ideally, the researcher would have been able to build relationships with participants through attending trainings alongside those individuals, thereby embodying the CBPR value of creating “long-term” relationships and “providing more power to participants in research approaches and decisions” (Scanton, 2014). Some of the content discussed among participants was emotional and potentially triggering, which was difficult to assess over tele-video
conference. If the researcher was present, she would have been more able to respond to these cues effectively, and provided support to participants who may have been struggling, thereby creating a safer environment to discuss tender subject matters, potentially leading to increased depth in what was shared.

**Implications for Future Research**

The current study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness of Kaleidoscope Connect in promoting resilience, preventing suicide, enhancing school climate and community safety, and providing feasible programing. The sample included adults’ perspectives, which provided a historically underrepresented voice in SEL intervention literature. Future research could integrate the perspectives of both adults and youth in these programs, which would provide a more accurate picture of the outcomes assessed. Furthermore, the integration of outcome data, such as academic measures (including grade point averages and graduation rates) or mental health screening tools (such as the Patient Health Questionnaire - 4, Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams & Lowe, 2009) could provide information about the predictive value of this program in mitigating common risk factors youth encounter.

Future research could also adopt the suggestions provided by Scanton (2014) in an effort to adopt research approaches that illuminate the ways in which cross-cultural implications and colonization may impede the establishment of true community-centered, trauma-informed relationships. To decolonize cross-cultural research and cross-cultural social-emotional intervention programs, as well as ensuring these efforts are trauma-informed, the curriculum must include respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (referred to as the “four R’s”) (Scanton, 2014). Respect includes continuing and enhancing opportunities for realistic time commitments for participants, building long-lasting relationships between researchers, educators,
and community members, and engaging indigenous and other minority community members in every phase and aspect of the intervention and research endeavors. Relevance ensures that community interests direct the program’s design and implementation, that oral storytelling and dialogue guide intervention efforts, and meaning making is guided by Indigenous and minority groups. Reciprocity included sharing results with teachers, school leaders and community members, which will not only ensure increased trust, but will also fulfill the suggestion to further increase knowledge of the program among the community. Reciprocity also includes allowing the information and experiences gathered by Kaleidoscope Connect participants to inform changes in their schools and communities. Finally, responsibility ensures that the program includes tribal protocols, allowing indigenous and minority community members to maintain “control” of the program in every way possible (Scanton, 2014).

The CBPR principles outlined by Scanton (2014) could be adopted by both researchers in future evaluative projects of Kaleidoscope Connect, and Brightways Learning as an organization. Researchers can make an increased effort to create long lasting relationships in the community, and make every effort for community members to make empirical and organization decisions for data collection, as well as disseminating results with participants before publication. Brightways Learning is making well-defined efforts and achieving many of these principles in their work, which deserves to be acknowledged. As one participant shared and with whom many agreed, community members “feel respected and seen” by the providers of the Kaleidoscope Connect program. The organization might consider offering more “ownership” of the program by allowing local families and organizations to host Phlight clubs and other Kaleidoscope Connect activities at a community centered, locally owned home or gathering place may address some of the apprehension Native families experience about their involvement in school-sponsored
activities. Furthermore, creating more community partners who hold diverse roles (for example, administrators in the school systems, elders in local churches and venerated cultural leaders) is essential. Community partners can support widespread understanding of the framework’s components and aims and would also facilitate the tailoring of the program’s delivery to a community’s unique challenges and cultural practices. Lastly, creating more community partnerships can expand community member’s knowledge of the program’s effectiveness, which can expand its dissemination and adoption.

**Conclusion**

The current project (Study 1 and 2) evaluated the perceived effectiveness of the Kaleidoscope Connect program to promote resilience among youth, mitigate suicide risks, and enhance school climate and community safety. Additionally, this project also evaluated the feasibility of the framework’s delivery, as well as barriers to its dissemination. Survey and focus group data revealed that participants are invested in the program, suggesting that it is at least moderately effective in achieving the aforementioned goals. Furthermore, participants shared that the program is feasible to implement, as it is flexible, easy to understand, and comprehensive. Participants indicated that the most effective aspects of the program included the language of the framework. Specifically, the metaphorical mapping of one’s risk and protective factors appeared to greatly enhance the youth’s ability to discuss the hardships they experience and connect with their peers and other adults in times of distress. Participants shared emotional stories of youth whose lives, they believed, were saved by the program’s offerings. Given the rate of mental health issues and isolation among the communities from which participants were recruited, the ability of the program to successfully achieve building connections between youth and adults is profoundly important. Research outlines numerous benefits, including a reduction
in mental health symptoms, suicidality, substance abuse and truancy (Pisani et al., 2013) for youth who are strongly connected to adults in their community. The data also suggest ways in which the program, from participants’ perspectives, could be enhanced, including creating stronger community partnerships that provide local individuals with more influence and ownership of the program’s implementation, and working to disseminate a broad understanding of the program’s effectiveness among more community members. Additionally, participants appreciated the flexibility of the curriculum delivery, and would continue to benefit from exploration of ways in which the program can be applied in “kernels” (Embry & Biglan, 2008).

The framework is a powerful resource for youth and families in need, and participants conveyed a strong belief in its effectiveness for their communities. The findings demonstrate that the Kaleidoscope Connect framework holds great value for the areas it serves, and participants are invested in its expanded dissemination, as they believe it can enhance, and even save, a youth’s life, as well as enhance the well-being and connection of rural and indigenous communities.
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https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.0000000000000060

https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025456


Appendix A
Kaleidoscope Connect Evaluation Survey (KCES)

Please tell us in which city or town and state you currently live:

Program Evaluation

1) In which Kaleidoscope Connect activities have you participated? Check all that apply:
   a) Adult Training
   b) Kaleidoscope Lessons dissemination
   c) PHlight club
   d) Other (Please describe in a few words what this means to you):

2) What was your role as a participant in those activities? Check all that apply:
   a) Teacher
   b) Parent
   c) Staff
   d) Other (Please describe in a few words what this means to you):

3) Were you invited to participate in the program (any Kaleidoscope Connect activity) by a youth as an anchor?
   a) Yes
   b) No
   c) Not sure

4) Please indicate how many times you have participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity. Please list that number next to each activity below.
   a. Kaleidoscope Connect Academy: _______________________________
   b. Resilient Educator Training: _______________________________
   c. PHlight Club: _______________________________
   d. Kaleidoscope Lessons: _______________________________
   e. Other activity (please specify): _______________________________

5) A) Are you closely connected to at least one youth who has participated in a PHlight club or in the Kaleidoscope Lessons in the past (not including the current activity)?
   a) Yes
   b) No

   B) If Yes, what is the nature of your role with the youth? (Check all that apply)
      a) Parent
b) Teacher
c) Staff
d) Community member (please specify ________________)
e) Other (please specify _________________)

6) If you are a teacher, staff, or other adult who participated in the implementation of the Kaleidoscope Lessons or Phlight club, how feasible did you find the process?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not feasible Moderately At all feasible
Extremely feasible

7) A) If you’re a parent, has your own child participated in a Kaleidoscope Connect activity?
   a) Yes
   b) No

   B) If yes, please indicate in which activity your child participated?
   a) Kaleidoscope Lessons
   b) PHlight Club
   c) Other (Please describe in a few words what this means to you):

8) A) Over the past 12 months, please indicate how many youths you know who have attempted or committed suicide in your community.
   Attempted:
   Committed:

   B) If YES, has this youth participated in a PHlight Club event or in Kaleidoscope Connect Lessons?
   a) Yes
   b) No
   c) Not sure

9) In your opinion, to what degree could the Kaleidoscope Connect program help prevent youth from attempting suicide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No prevention Moderate prevention Excellent Prevention
10) From your view, to what degree does the Kaleidoscope Connect program strengthen a youth’s connection to adults?

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<td>The program Does not strengthen connection</td>
<td>The program Moderately strengthen connection</td>
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11) Does the Kaleidoscope Connect program help create a more positive school climate for youth?

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<td>Isn’t helpful</td>
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12) Does the Kaleidoscope Connect program help create a safer community where you and the youth you know live?

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<td>4</td>
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13) Think of the youths you know who have participated in the program. Please list the risk factors (e.g., poverty, abuse and neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, etc.) that are present in their lives below:

14) Think of the youths you know who have participated in the program. Please list the protective factors (e.g., financial resources, strong relationships, innate characteristics, etc.) that are present in their lives below:
15) What is an aspect of Kaleidoscope Connect that you would like to see added to their activities (e.g., training, curriculum or PHlight club - please be specific)?

16) What do you feel is the primary message of the Kaleidoscope Connect program?

17) What part of Kaleidoscope Connect do you find to be the most valuable?

Demographic Information

Please indicate your age category below:
  a) 18-20
  b) 21-29
  c) 30-39
  d) 40-49
  e) 50-59
  f) 60 or older

Please select the race with which you identify
  a) White or Caucasian
  b) Black or African-American
  c) American Indian or Alaskan Native (if so, please indicate the tribe with which you identify: ______________________)
  d) Asian
  e) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  f) From multiple races (If so, please specify: ________________________________)
  g) Some other race (please specify: ________________________________)

Please indicate your gender identity:
  A) Female
  B) Male
  C) Another gender (please specify: ________________________________)
Please indicate your marital status:
   a) Married
   b) Domestic partnership
   c) Widowed
   d) Divorced
   e) Separated
   f) Never married

Please indicate the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received:
   a) Less than a high school degree
   b) High School degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
   c) Some college but no degree
   d) Associate degree
   e) Bachelor degree
   f) Graduate degree
Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

These questions will be used as a guide to direct conversations among focus group participants.

1. Think of a youth who has participated in this program. What types of challenges or risk factors has this youth faced in the past? Currently? Is Kaleidoscope Connect helpful in addressing these risk factors?

2. What are some factors present in the youth’s life that support their resilience (e.g., resources, innate characteristics, community values and culture, relationships, etc.)?

3. Can you think of a time that a youth you know encountered a challenge and overcame that challenge and demonstrated success?

4. How does the culture of the community (e.g., language, values, gender roles, roles in the community, etc.) in which the youth resides influence their connection with adults?
   
   (Note: There will be a follow-up questions about specific information related to a youth’s individual identity and culture if relevant and appropriate).

5. Does the Kaleidoscope Connect program enhance a youth’s school climate (e.g., their relationships with adults at school, peer to peer relationships, perceptions of safety, engagement in school, etc.)? If yes, how? If no, why not?

6. Could the Kaleidoscope Connect program impact youth in their experience of thoughts or attempts of suicide? If yes, how?

7. Does the Kaleidoscope Connect program benefit youth participants? If so, how? If not, why not?

8. Do you find this program to be useful and worthwhile? Why or why not?

9. What do you like best about this program?

10. What do you like least?

11. What recommendations would you have, if any, to improve the program?