



A LONGITUDINAL OUTCOMES STUDY •

SUPPORTIVE IMMERSION AT THE BRIDGE COSTA RICA

RESPONSE-ABILITY

FROM EXPERIENTIAL DEPRIVATION TO DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, young adult wellbeing has plummeted globally. Emerging research from The Supportive Immersion Institute highlights a systemic issue to explain this decline: **Experiential Deprivation**, or a scarcity of meaningful engagement in learning experiences that build real-world confidence. This longitudinal study examines how The Bridge Costa Rica, a supportive gap program that combines cultural immersion, therapeutic coaching, real-world life skills practice, and experiential learning, moves young adults from avoidance and stagnation to active **Response-Ability**: the capacity to trust themselves to problem-solve in ways that work for them.

44

TOTAL STUDY
PARTICIPANTS

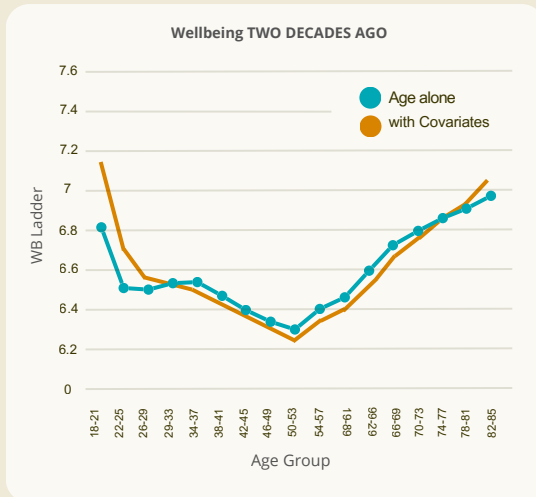
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EXIT GRADUATES
AGES 17-23

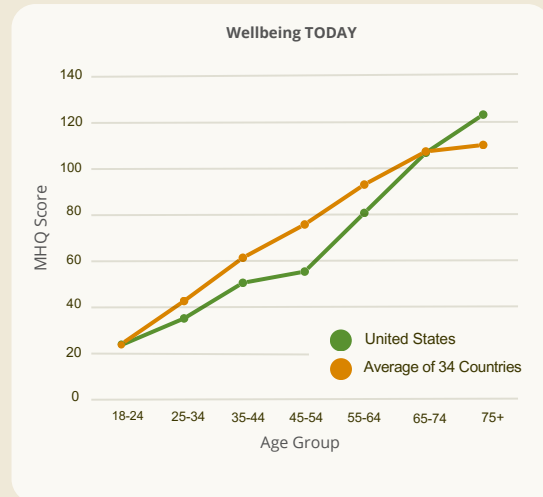
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LIFE AFTER ALUMNI
5-11 YEARS POST-GRADUATION

THE DECLINE OF MENTAL WELLBEING IN YOUNG ADULTS



WB Ladder by age, 2008 — reproduced from Stone AA et al., PNAS, 2010.



MHQ Score by age, 2021 (Sapien Labs, Global Mind Health Report).

THE MENTAL HEALTH PARADOX

Historically, young adults enjoyed the highest levels of psychological wellbeing across their lifespans. Today, they report the lowest. Intriguingly, research reveals that young adults in less economically developed regions often exhibit higher mind health and wellbeing than those in wealthier, highly resourced nations.

Why? Technologies of all kinds are meant to make processes easier and more efficient, which is great to satisfy our needs, but not to learn the process to satisfy them. When this learning process is removed, young adults are deprived of the essential trial-and-error experiences required to build psychological resilience.

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Convenience is all destination and no journey. But climbing a mountain is different from taking the tram to the top, even if you end up at the same place.

— TIM WU, AUTHOR & CULTURAL CRITIC

The 3 Ingredients of Experiential Deprivation

Lack of or poor exposure to meaningful engagement can be caused or cause the following patterns:

01 Locked-In Brain

Insensitivity to context and an inability to adapt or learn from experience.

02 Occupational Deprivation

Lack of access to meaningful occupations leading to atrophied life skills and diminished self-efficacy.

03 Experiential Avoidance

Unwillingness to endure uncomfortable internal experiences, triggering short-term relief but long-term dysfunction.

BASELINE STATE: BEFORE ARRIVING AT THE BRIDGE

When entering the program, participants consistently reported an avoidant, deflated stance toward life. Fearing failure in a competitive and judgmental world, many had turned inward.



01 · SHUT DOWN

Defensive Avoidance

Avoidance of tasks, relationships, and uncomfortable emotions.

"I would get really anxious, and I would shut down and avoid, when I was in an uncomfortable situation... I was somebody who could never get it done."

— PROGRAM GRADUATE

02 · LOST

Aimlessness & Shattered Confidence

Aimlessness, shattered confidence, and relying on others for direction.

"I was in my room all day, not talking to anybody, wanting to do something with my life but not knowing how to do it."

— PROGRAM GRADUATE



03 · STUCK

Stagnation & Friction

Deep stagnation, friction towards goal, and unhelpful coping mechanisms.

"I'd look around, and I wouldn't be doing anything with my life. I'd just be inside playing video games or out drunk, and I didn't know what to do about that."

— PROGRAM GRADUATE





WHAT DRIVES TRANSFORMATION?

How do young adults transition from feeling **shut down, lost, and stuck** to taking charge of their lives? Research participants highlighted two key metaphors describing the environment at The Bridge:

1. The Sandbox

A non-judgmental space where young adults can experiment, build, fail, and rebuild with manageable real-world consequences to learn from.

2. Cardboard & Straws Prototyping

Treating personal growth like design thinking—testing low-stakes strategies, routines, and habits to see what works before committing long-term.

THE 6 IMPACTING ELEMENTS IN CONSTANT CONVERSATION

These 6 elements together form **experiential dialectics**, where freedom and structure, support and challenge, stimulation and slow pace all coexist to evoke **response-ability**.

1 Exploration & Novelty

Space to try new things, step outside comfort zones, and experience life in different ways.

3 Real-World Challenges

Problem-solving opportunities in real-world scenarios with guidance to learn how to best respond to those situations.

5 Freedom Within a Goal

Agency to explore unique pathways to achieve a personal version of healthy living and contribution.

2 Low-Stakes Environment

High safety, warmth, and non-judgmental support, allowing for “sloppy” first attempts at growth.

4 Resource-Rich Environment

Ample opportunities for engagement with a variety of resources and perspectives.

6 Iteration & Feedback

Continuous practice to refine life strategies with constant guidance on how to improve with each attempt.

THE CORE FINDING

Through reflexive thematic analysis, participant voices converged on one unifying statement summarizing their transformation:



BREAKDOWN OF TRANSFORMATION

1

"I TRUST MYSELF"

Self-Reliance & Confidence

Moving from self doubt to confidence based on evidence

"The biggest impact the program had on me was the growth of my self-reliance and my trust in my ability to do things that I wanted to do once I set my mind to them."

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2

"TO PROBLEM-SOLVE"

Adaptability & Resilience

Shifting from avoidance to actively leaning into discomfort, improvising, and bouncing back from setbacks.

"There can be really intense times of discomfort, but just that ability to be a rock through it... to say, 'Hey, I'm not gonna run away from it.' That highlights my first real step into adulthood."

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3

"BASED ON WHAT WORKS FOR ME"

Autonomy & Self-Management

Ceasing to follow others' path to understand how they best operate and solve problems

"What I learned was that others cannot live my life for me... You won't find fulfillment in others' decisions. A lot of these ideas have to come from you."

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ABOUT THE BRIDGE COSTA RICA

The Bridge is a supportive gap program located in Costa Rica designed for young adults (male and female, ages 17–23) seeking growth, life skills, and direction. We blend:



**THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY SUPPORT
& GROUP THERAPY**



ADVENTURE TRAVEL



**EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING & LIFE
SKILLS COACHING**



COLLEGE CLASSES



INTERNSHIPS



CULTURAL IMMERSION & COMMUNITY SERVICE

