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**Gaisce - The President's Award**

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in its participants?

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# Research Team

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Dr. Gary O'Reilly is a Senior Lecturer/ Director of the Doctoral Training Programme in Clinical Psychology at University College Dublin. He also has a part-time appointment as a Principal Clinical Psychologist at Temple St. Children's Hospital. He is both a practicing clinician and an academic researcher. In recent years a significant focus of his work is the development and evaluation of user-friendly Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) interventions for young people delivered through a computer game and App called "Pesky gNATs". The aim of Pesky gNATs is to contribute to the transformation of mental health intervention for young people through technology on a sustainable not-for-profit basis. For more details please see [www.PeskyGnats.com](http://www.PeskyGnats.com) or follow us on twitter @peskygnats.

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## Introduction

Keen to explore the impact of participation in the Gaisce Awards programme for young people, the Council (board) of Gaisce – The President’s Award undertook to support independent doctoral research. This synopsis of the full PhD was published in 2015 as part of the organisation’s 30th anniversary celebrations and highlights the very positive impact that participation in Gaisce has on young people with respect to a variety of competencies and psychological attributes. The research findings particularly align with the national policy framework for children and young people, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, and the National Youth Strategy.

Launching the research, then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr James Reilly, referred to the research providing ‘clear and convincing evidence of just how pivotal a role Gaisce plays in the development of so many of our young people, who are Ireland’s greatest asset’.

Gaisce – The President’s Award wishes to thank the researcher, Niamh Clarke McMahon and the team in UCD for undertaking and completing the project and is pleased to acknowledge the role played by previous Council members, Gaisce staff, Gaisce PALs and, of course, the young people that took part in the research also.

## Abstract

The mission of Gaisce–The President’s Award is to contribute to the development of all young people of Ireland between the ages of 15 and 25 years, but particularly those most in need of opportunity and inspiration.

Participants in the Gaisce programme set themselves personal challenges in four categories, and the Award progression encourages them to strive and achieve their goals, with the object of promoting their self-development and the betterment of their communities.

The current research is the first to examine whether participation in Gaisce–The President’s Award acts as a catalyst for the enhancement of the positive psychological attributes of hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being in its participants. In addition, the study investigated whether Gaisce–The President’s Award programme meets the inclusion criteria to be termed a Positive Youth Development Programme.

The study compared male and female Gaisce participants with a control group of male and female community-based young people. The research adopted a positive psychology strengths-based approach, in contrast to the traditional clinical psychological deficits-based model.

In order to obtain a comprehensive and inclusive study, a mixed methods approach was employed, using standardised questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The research consisted of seven components:

- Study 1 - analysis of factor structure and reliability of the five scales utilised in this research, using EFA and CFA on the Bronze Award participants and control participants who responded to invitations to participate in the research at Time 1 (N=647);

- Study 2 - Bronze Award quantitative analyses (n=283);
- Study 3 - Bronze Award matched quantitative analyses (n=81);
- Study 4 - Bronze Award lowest quartile quantitative analyses;
- Study 5 - Gold Award quantitative analyses (n=62);
- Study 6 - Bronze Award qualitative analysis (n=64); and
- Study 7 - Gold Award qualitative analysis (n=11).

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research confirmed and corroborated each other. The following key findings emerged from the study.

The quantitative results confirmed that participation in the Gaisce programme significantly enhanced levels of hope (pathways) thinking and self-efficacy for both Bronze and Gold Gaisce participants. The findings also identified that participation significantly improved levels of hope (pathways), self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being for Bronze participants who had scored in the lowest quartile of the group in pre-testing against their control counterparts. The Bronze and Gold qualitative results verified that participation in the Award enhanced participants’ personal strengths and psychological attributes. The research also confirmed that Gaisce–The President’s Award programme meets the stipulated inclusion criteria to be termed a Positive Youth Development Programme.

The research findings have important policy and practice implications for government departments and other organisations involved in the delivery of services for young Irish people.

## Acknowledgements

Dr. Clarke MacMahon and Dr. O'Reilly would like express their sincere gratitude to the following people who contributed to this research:

- All the young people who took part in the research, and their parents, teachers and schools.
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# Chapter One: Methodology

## Introduction

This research employed a mixed methods design which involved gathering, analysing and inferring both quantitative and qualitative data on the participants of the study, which allowed for cross-validation of material and created a more complete understanding of the subject matter (see Methodological Flow Chart, below).

## Quantitative Study

In the quantitative aspect of the research, 345 (N=345) adolescents and young adults responded, comprising both Gaisce Bronze and Gaisce Gold participants and Bronze and Gold control participants, pre and post.

## Bronze Quantitative Study

In the Bronze quantitative study, 283 (N=283) participants completed online questionnaires at pre-Gaisce participation (Time 1) and post-Gaisce participation (Time 2). All participants were drawn from Transition Year and Fifth Year students in

secondary schools across Ireland. The Bronze Gaisce group included 95 females (mean age 15.67, SD 0.61 years) and 57 males (mean age 15.74, SD 0.48 years), while the Bronze control group included 69 females (mean age 16.04, SD 0.74 years) and 62 males (mean age 16.15, SD 0.67 years). The Bronze Gaisce respondents came from 18 different counties in Ireland, while the Bronze control group represented 9 different counties.

## Gold Quantitative Study

The total number of individuals who completed pre and post questionnaires in the Gold quantitative study was 62 (N=62). The majority of these were third-level students. The Gold Gaisce group included 21 females (mean age 19.1, SD 2.2 years) and 10 males (mean age 19.8, SD 2.2 years), while the Gold control group included 24 females (mean age 22.58, SD 2.62 years) and 7 males (mean age 19.43, SD 3.82 years). The Gold Gaisce respondents were from 14 different counties, while the Gold control group represented 14 different counties.

## Methodological Flow Chart

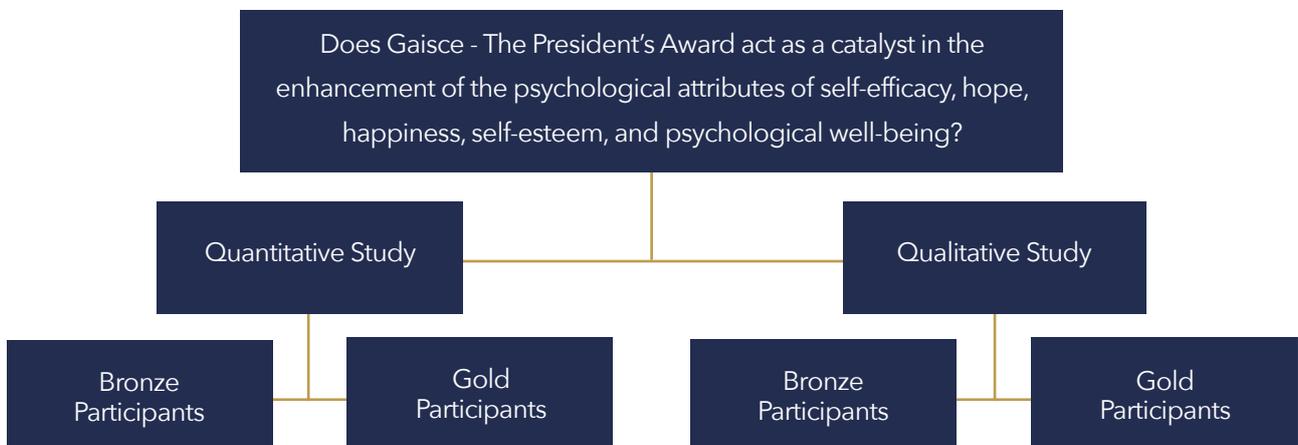


Figure 1.1 Methodological Flow Chart

## Questionnaires

### Demographic Questionnaire

1. The Children's Hope Scale (Snyder, Hoza, Pelham, Rapoff, Ware, Danovsky, Highberger, Ribinstein and Stahl, 1997)  
  
The Adult State Hope Scale (Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, and Higgins, 1996)
2. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (Jerusalem and Schwarzer, 1995)
3. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
4. The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999)
5. The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Long-Form 84-Items) (Ryff, 1989)

### Demographic Questionnaire

The Demographic Questionnaire was specifically designed for the present study and gathered data on gender, age, level of education, family composition, parental occupation, and other information. It was administered to all participants.

### The Children's Hope Scale

The six-item Children's Hope Scale was designed for use among children and adolescents aged 8 to 19 years. The scale contains three items belonging to the 'Agency' subscale which assesses the child's perceived ability to reach goals (Snyder et al., 1997), and three items belonging to the 'Pathways' subscale which measures the child's ability to form routes to achieving these goals. All items consist of a statement and the child is asked to indicate the level to which they agree with the statement. To calculate the total hope score, a value of '1' is given to 'None of the Time', '2' to 'A little of the Time', '3' to 'Some of the Time', '4' to 'A lot of the Time' and '5' to 'Most of the

Time'. The total hope score is calculated by adding together the values on each of the six items. The score for the 'Agency' subscale is calculated by adding the values on the odd-numbered items while the score for the 'Pathways' subscale is calculated by adding the values on the even-numbered items. The Children's Hope Scale questionnaire takes four minutes to complete. It has excellent validity and reliability. It is a comprehensive and informative measure, designed by Snyder and colleagues (1997) based on the tenets of the new positive psychology movement, hypothesising that high hope levels would be predictive of developmental success for children.

### The Adult State Hope Scale

Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, and Higgins (1996) designed the Adult State Hope Scale which assesses goal-directed thinking in any given situation. Respondents are required to answer the questions in a manner that relates to, "how you think about yourself right now". The respondent is encouraged to focus on their present life circumstances. The questionnaire consists of six statements and the respondent is asked to indicate the level to which they agree with this statement on an eight-point Likert scale ranging from '1' ('Definitely False') to '8' ('Definitely True'). Three of the items belong to the 'Agency' (goal-directed energy) subscale and three to the 'Pathways' (planning to meet goals) subscale. Total scores are calculated by summing the values given on all six items. 'Agency' subscale scores are calculated by adding the given values on all the even items, while 'Pathways' subscale scores are calculated by adding the given values on all the odd items. The Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) has been validated for use among adult, mainly student, populations (Maygar-Moe, 2009).

## The General Self-Efficacy Scale

The ten-item General Self-Efficacy Scale by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1995) has been validated for use in numerous languages for use among adolescent and adult samples (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña and Schwarzer, 2005). The scale was designed to measure optimistic self-beliefs that are theorised to help the individual to cope with a variety of different life stressors (Jerusalem and Schwarzer, 1995). The scale explicitly measures personal agency. This is the belief that one's actions are directly related to outcomes (Jerusalem and Schwarzer, 1995). Each item on the scale consists of a statement and the respondent has to indicate on a four-point Likert scale the degree to which the statement is personally true for them. A value of '1' indicates that it is 'Not at all true', a value of '2' that it is 'Hardly true', a value of '3' that it is 'Moderately true' and a value of '4' indicates that the statement is 'Exactly true'. The total score for the scale is calculated by summing the values given for each individual item. Scores for the scale range from 10 (indicative of a very low level of self-efficacy) to 40 (indicative of a very high level of self-efficacy). The General Self-Efficacy Scale is a valid and reliable measure. High self-efficacy has been found to correlate positively with a number of adaptive indicators and negatively with maladaptive indicators (Luszczynska et al., 2005), indicating that self-efficacy is an important developmental asset for young people.

## The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale' (Rosenberg (1965) is a measure of the degree of positive orientation towards oneself, and has been extensively used in studies across the world. Five of the items on the 'Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale' are positively-worded statements and five are negatively-worded statements. Respondents are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with the statement on a four-point scale with the options. To

calculate Self-Esteem scores, on positively-worded items, 'Strongly Agree (SA)' is given a value of '3', 'Agree (A)' a value of '2', 'Disagree (D)' a value of '1' and 'Strongly Disagree (SD)' a value of '0'. Negatively-worded items are scored in reverse, i.e., 'SA' is given a value of '0' and so on. The values on each item are then summed to give a total Self-Esteem score. Previous studies indicate that although Self-Esteem is an important buffer in coping with a variety of daily life demands (Leary, 1999), the period of adolescence sees significant fluctuations in Self-Esteem levels (Laible, Carlo and Roesch, 2004). Therefore, it is worthwhile measuring how Self-Esteem levels in adolescents are affected by participation in the Gaisce Award programme. The 'Rosenberg Self-Esteem' scale was selected for this study due to its well-established validity for use in diverse samples (Schmitt and Allik, 2005).

## The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

Participants also completed the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). This brief index of subjective happiness or well-being has been well validated in many studies. Two items on the scale offer brief descriptions of happy and unhappy people and the respondent is asked to indicate the extent to which this characterisation describes them on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from '1' ('Not at All') to '7' ('A Great Deal'). The third item on the scale requires the respondent to indicate their level of happiness relevant to peers on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from '1' ('Less Happy') to '7' ('More Happy'). The final item requires the respondent to indicate their general level of happiness on a seven point Likert scale that ranges from '1' ('Not a Very Happy Person') to '7' ('A Very Happy Person'). The total happiness score is calculated by adding the scores given by the respondent on each of the items. One of the characterisation items is reverse-scored. Subjective happiness levels have been found to correlate highly with other measures of well-being

(Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). Yet happiness levels are highly affected by an individual's lifestyle and ways in which they pursue happiness (Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006). The Subjective Happiness Scale was chosen as a measure for this research for its excellent psychometric properties despite its brevity as a measure.

## The Psychological Well-Being Scale (Long-Form [84-Items])

Participants also completed the 84-item Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989), based on principles of theoretical literature. The Ryff scale consist of six subscales assessing different aspects of psychological well-being, 'Autonomy', 'Environmental Mastery', 'Personal Growth', 'Positive Relations with Others', 'Purpose in Life' and 'Self-Acceptance'. The respondent rates their level of agreement with the 84 subscale items on a Likert scale ranging from '1' (indicating strong disagreement) to '6' (strong agreement). Scores for each of the subscales are calculated by summing the ratings given for each of the subscale items. About half of the items on the scale are reverse-scored. High scores on any one subscale indicate mastery for the respondent in that aspect of psychological functioning. Conversely, low scores indicate low levels of competency for the respondent in that aspect of well-being. As Ryff (1989) incorporated theories of mental health, self-actualisation, appraisal, functioning, maturity and developmental lifespan into the design of the scale, it is a comprehensive measure of aspects of well-being that are not represented in other measures (Ryff, 1989). While originally designed for an adult population, other pieces of research successfully used the scale with an adolescent population.

## Qualitative Questions

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 64 (N=64) Bronze Gaisce participants, representing 6 counties of Ireland. There were 39 females and 25 males. Interviews also took place with 11 (N=11) Gold Gaisce participants, representing 8 counties. There were 7 males and 4 females. The same set of questions was asked of both groups.

## Research Questions

A semi-structured interview format containing open-ended questions followed by probes was used for the qualitative component of the research.

The questions used were as follows:

- How did you select what you would do for each of the four challenges of Gaisce–The President's Award?
- Tell me about your experience of taking part in Gaisce–The President's Award?
- What did you like best about the Award?
- What aspect of the Award has been most helpful to you?
- What did you like least about the Award?
- What skills did you gain from completing the Award?
- Would you recommend the Award to a friend?
- Thinking back, was there any experience that stood out during your Gaisce Award?
- In what way, if any, have you changed as a result of doing the Gaisce Award?
- Is there anything about the Award that you think should be changed and why?
- Is there anything else about the Award that you would like to share?

Probes such as "tell me/us more about that...", "Would you say more about...", "Can you describe

what you mean”, and “Please explain further”, were used to generate further discussion or to gain greater understanding of the participants’ experience.

## Procedure

Permission to conduct this research was requested and granted from the Minister for Children Barry Andrews and the Council of Gaisce. Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee–Humanities, College of Human Sciences, University College Dublin. The researcher also obtained approval from the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) for their website address to be displayed at the end of the online survey. Permission to conduct the research with all the Bronze control participants was given from the Principals of each of the participating schools. Informed consent or assent was obtained from all Gaisce and control participants and from the parents of the Bronze study participants.

An invitation to participate in the study was posted by Gaisce to all schools with students participating in Gaisce’s Bronze Award. The Gold Gaisce participants received an individual email from Gaisce inviting them to participate in the research.

The quantitative component of the research was administered online, pre and post participation in the Gaisce Award programmes. Participants completed the questionnaires either at home or in school.

In the qualitative component, participants were randomly selected, and the researcher met with each participant that took part in the qualitative aspect of the research. Interviews took 30 to 40 minutes for the Bronze participants, and 45 to 60 minutes for the Gold participants.

## Data Management

All data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Procedures for Social Sciences), Version 18. Raw data were recorded and totals computed as per questionnaire instructions. Internal reliability (Crombach’s Alpha) was calculated for each measure. Appropriate parametric tests were performed using independent mixed analyses of variance and independent 2x2 between groups. As this research was exploratory in nature, it was necessary to conduct exploratory factor analyses on all five questionnaires. Confirmatory factor analyses were then conducted on one of the original five questionnaires. Non-parametric analyses were also applied to the dataset in order to address the research question. The Bronze quantitative data were further sub-divided into two smaller groups, a matched group and a lowest quartile group, in order to facilitate further pre-planned analysis. The approach taken to this will be outlined fully in the following chapters.

In the qualitative component of the research, all interviews were auto-recorded and transcribed verbatim and stored electronically under password protection. The qualitative data were analysed using a thematic analysis method and an inter-rater reliability test was undertaken to determine the confidence in the generated themes. The Kappa Co-efficient for inter-rater reliability was .71 for the qualitative analyses for the Bronze study and .8 for the Gold study. Further observations were employed through meticulous counting and coding of the participants’ comments.

# Chapter Two: Adolescence and Early Adulthood

## Historical context

The scientific study of adolescence as a unique developmental stage began with the publication in 1904 of a two-volume text *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime and Religion* (1904a; 1904b) by the pioneering American psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall. Hall's interests focussed on childhood development and evolutionary theory. In his textbook on adolescence, Hall's theory stated that changes in human development mirrored the changes that occurred during the evolutionary process. The adolescent period of development was equivalent to the evolutionary period when the human species changed from being animal to being civilised.

While some educators and psychologists viewed adolescents and the adolescent period in a positive light, the general view among most practitioners during the 20th century was that the adolescent period was one of "storm and stress", a phrase coined by Hall. Benson (2003) noted that during the 20th century, adolescents were generally regarded as being "broken or in danger of becoming broken". This viewpoint sat very comfortably in the general scope of psychology during the 20th century, which emphasised the defective view of human development, as opposed to studying psychological strengths. Young people were depicted as "problems to be managed". As recently as 1969, some therapists saw the adolescent years as a distinct period of developmental disturbance. Even up to 1999, Positive Youth Development was characterised as the absence of problem behaviours.

From the beginning of the 21st century, the combined interest of developmental systems theorists and an increasing awareness of the second decade of life as a unique developmental period led to the emergence of a new dynamic perspective on

adolescence which viewed young people as resources to be nurtured.

## Adolescence

Dictionaries define adolescence as a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development, occurring during the period from puberty to full adulthood. This straightforward definition does not fully capture the importance or the complexity of this unique developmental period, which provides the young person with independence, opportunities, and also pitfalls which must be negotiated and traversed in order to reach adulthood. As adolescents begin to gain greater independence from parents and seek to obtain peer acceptance, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that carry risk.

Access to what are called protective factors is seen as of paramount importance during these years. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2011) defines protective factors as the conditions or attributes in individuals, families and communities that mitigate risk and increase health and well-being. They have also been identified by Benson, Scales, Hawkins, Oesterle and Hill and the Search Institute (2004) as internal and external factors that help to prevent and reduce vulnerability for the development of psychological difficulties.

According to Giedd and Drury (2009), adolescence is a period of "brain plasticity" which provides a unique opportunity for brain pathways to combine with genetic heritage to consolidate and stimulate brain development, supporting the psychological theory that humans are not bound strictly by their genetic blueprints. During the adolescent period, young people who are motivated to seize opportunities to learn and experience (e.g., music, sports, academics,

skills, adventures, etc.) enhance both their brain activity and their potential.

## Young adulthood

The period known variously as the young or early or emerging adulthood period has not received the same intense interest from psychologists as the adolescent period. Early adulthood is generally perceived as less erratic than adolescence as it marks the transition into a more stable period, with the development of intimate relationships, stronger friendships and career security. It is accepted that the foundations that are laid in adolescence contribute to the unfolding development of life as an adult.

Psychological separation from, and the establishment of an adult relationship with, parents will be completed during this developmental period. Longer term goals, such as career and family, replace the short term goals associated with the adolescent period. According to Feldman, Allen and Celikel (2003), while physical development and maturation are generally thought of as complete at young adulthood, some organs, including the brain, continue to grow.

## Mental health difficulties and behaviours in adolescence and young adulthood

Positive psychology acknowledges that, with the assistance of supportive peers and adults, many young people successfully manage the transition to adulthood. Others go through a turbulent period, but most eventually emerge stronger and more resilient as a result of their experiences. But there are some for whom the adolescent and young adult years prove extremely difficult, and during which their psychological vulnerabilities are exposed. During this period, mental health difficulties are most likely to

begin, and without intervention, can often continue into adulthood.

As the World Health Organisation advised in their research report (p3) in 2003, "Mental health is a most important, maybe the most important, public health issue, which ... society must [seek] to promote, to protect and to invest in." Following a review of international statistics, Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, and McGorry (2007) concluded the probability that any individual child will suffer from at least one mental health disorder, in any given country in any given year, is one in every four to five children.

The statistics in Ireland are very similar, with the Clonmel Project (Martin and Carr, 2006) noting that the mental health problems of many Irish adolescents go unrecognised and untreated. Anxiety disorders were found to be most prevalent in adolescents, accounting for 43% overall of psychological problems reported. Further, a recent Irish report "Male Youths and Suicide Project" (2013) highlighted that the number of Irish male youth suicides were the third highest in Europe.

Social loneliness has been described by Ilardi (2009) as a modern plague for young people, peaking in adolescence. Research repeatedly indicates that the absence of supportive others or friends increases young people's likelihood of developing anxiety and depression.

Conclusions on the state of youth mental health in Ireland in a rigorous analysis of data from a nationally representative Irish sample by Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012), found that one-fifth of respondents indicated that they had engaged in some form of self-harm, and one-third had stated that they had experienced some level of mental health distress. Furthermore, over two-fifths of those surveyed reported that they had thought that their life was not worth living at some point.

## Protective and risk factors for mental health

Protective factors are defined by Greenberg (2006) as psychological strengths which contribute to an individual's positive well-being, while risk factors are described by Alperstein and Raman (2003) as factors that have the potential to trigger a psychological disorder or aggravate an already existing disorder. The way to minimise risk factors, they state, is to increase and develop protective factors. Studies of young people consistently show that the more protective factors they have, the less likely they are to engage in high-risk behaviours and the more likely they are to thrive (Benson and the Search Institute, 2004).

As Fombonne (1995) states, the identification of those protective mechanisms which assist in building and promoting positive mental health for all young people, but particularly those identified as being at risk, is one of the most significant concerns on the research agenda for psychologists, educators and government planners.

Masten and Coatsworth (1995) proposed that protective factors can reside either in the individual or in the environment. Internal protective factors are those located within the individual, such as high levels of hope, self-efficacy, happiness, self-esteem, and the ability to form positive supportive relationships with others. The provision of internal protective factors, Henderson and Milstein (1996) suggested, allows individuals to avail of external protective factors such as social support from peers and others, and organisational support.

Lerner (2004) proposed that youth development programmes were an important resource in promoting and developing protective factors in young people, as the skills, relationships and experiences acquired in these programmes during this developmental period helped to prepare and buffer the young person to enable them to deal with life's stressors and challenges.

## Developmental assets

Benson and the Search Institute (1997) sought to provide an answer to the question: what protects young people from today's problems? What, they asked, are the components, the personal competencies and environmental supports that act as protective factors in young people and buffer them against vulnerability to risky behaviour and mental health difficulties?

They coined the phrase "developmental assets", which they described as the "nutrients" to build protective factors and promote positive development. Encouraging and nurturing these developmental assets assist young people's psychological well-being and help them become healthy, thriving, and active members of society. Benson and the Search Institute (1997) created a framework of forty developmental assets they called "universal building blocks", powerful influences on adolescent behaviour: both protecting young people from many different risky behaviours and promoting positive attitudes and actions.

According to Benson, Scales and Roehlkepartain (2011), these developmental assets are essential positive experiences and qualities that influence the choices young people make and help them to become caring, responsible, successful adults. The Developmental Assets framework has become one of the most widely used approaches to positive youth development because of its proven effectiveness in enhancing resilience and promoting development in young people.

The developmental assets are categorised into external and internal assets, collectively identified as "primary contributors to personal thriving" (Snyder and Lopez, 2006). They represent the relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to avoid risks and to thrive. External assets are positive experiences that young people accrue through their interactions with supportive others and institutions, and internal assets are their

own personal characteristics and behaviours that stimulate their positive development.

## **Conclusion**

What is abundantly clear from the empirical literature is that during the adolescent and early adult period, all young people, not just the most vulnerable, need to develop positive personal attributes and have access to protective factors in the form of supportive relationships and positive institutions to enable them to enhance their well-being and to allow them to become healthy and contributing members of society.

# Chapter Three: Positive Psychology

## What is Positive Psychology?

Positive psychology is emerging as an important and valuable approach to the understanding, appreciation and promotion of human well-being, and to protecting individuals from mental health difficulties. According to Seligman (2011) the overall goal of positive psychology is to enhance and promote well-being.

Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of the human strengths that facilitate individuals and communities to prosper. Its three principal areas of concern, positive relationships, positive institutions, and positive attributes, all contribute to human well-being, which has been defined by the World Health Organisation (2011) as a state in which the individual realises his or her potential, can cope with normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own life.

## Origins

As early as 1902, William James was working on what he called "healthy-mindedness", examining the positive factors of happiness and hope, which he believed contributed to the health and well-being of an individual. Humanistic psychologists Maslow and Rogers, recognised as the "official grandfathers" of positive psychology, claimed in the 1950s that humans had a disposition towards positive actions and behaviours, achieved by accessing and realising their full range of talents and strengths.

Maslow (1954) was the first psychologist to coin the phrase "positive psychology". He noted that "the science of psychology had been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side." (pg.354). In 1998, Seligman picked up the banner of positive psychology, describing the science of psychology as

imbalanced, as "half-baked", with a disproportionate emphasis on mental illness rather than on well-being.

Positive psychology infiltrated into the public consciousness in the modern day over a relatively short number of decades, transforming from the over-arching "deficit model" of academic discourse up to the 1970s. In 2011, Seligman stated that the essential concerns of positive psychology should be with building human strengths as well as addressing weaknesses, with making the lives of normal people fulfilling, with nurturing high talent, and with the promotion of organisations, programmes and relationships that enhanced personal positive attributes.

## Positive psychology as a science

Duckworth, Steen and Seligman (pg.630, 2005) described positive psychology as the "scientific study of positive experience, positive human attributes and the institutions that facilitate their development". Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as the study of the processes and circumstances that enhance the most advantageous thriving of people, groups and organisations. Maddux (2008) highlighted that positive psychology emphasised the development of positive human attributes as a predictor of psychological mental health. Positive psychology provided a framework and language to help individuals to develop their skills and build competencies and relationships, thus advancing their personal strengths and reducing the possibility of psychological illness.

## The fundamental aspects of positive psychology

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Duckworth, Steen and Seligman (2005) considered

positive psychology to be about promoting at a subjective level an individual's levels of hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and well-being. At a group level, they perceived positive psychology as the programmes and organisations that encouraged a person to develop a sense of responsibility, altruism, and a greater awareness of relationships and citizenship. Diener (2009) stated that positive psychology placed importance on both the actualisation of the individual, and the contribution they played in the lives of others. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Duckworth, Steen and Seligman (2005) suggested that positive attributes, with the support of positive relationships and programmes, could act as a buffer against mental illness.

Viewing individuals as dynamic and capable agents for positive change lies at the heart of positive psychology. Seligman (2011) stated that individuals were capable of increasing their levels of engagement, accomplishment, sense of meaning, and positive relationships, which would increase their personal well-being, and ultimately allow them to flourish.

## Positive relationships

Positive relationships are considered vitally important to individual human development and well-being. For young people, the most influential relationships are the care-giver relationship (family) and the peer relationship (friendship).

## Family relationships

It is universally accepted that the family is the primary, and fundamental unit group of society. It is responsible for the survival, protection and development of the child. Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1969) saw the early care-giving experience as a fundamental relationship from a developmental

standpoint. The family is an agent of socialisation, and is considered the primary influence behind the formation of the personality and the growth of the child. For some children, this relationship is not the supportive and secure attachment that most children experience. While secure attachment could not be regarded as a guarantee of positive mental health, it certainly could be viewed as a protective factor. Research by Booth-LaForce and Kerns (2009) supported the view that secure care-giver attachment was significantly related to consequent social competence.

## Positive peer relationships

While parents may be the key impetus behind social competence skills, theorists such as Piaget (1960/1995) and Piaget and Inhelder (1969) argued that peers, being equals rather than authoritative figures like parents, can help children and adolescents to learn about reciprocal relationships, thus contributing to the young person's social, cognitive and moral development.

Positive peer relationships are important across the lifespan. La Fontana and Ollessen (2009) and Boyd and Bee (2005) stated that adolescence is a time when friendships and peer relations take on significant potency, with much personal importance being attached to successful peer functioning. For many adolescents, relationships with friends are the crucial interpersonal bridges that move them towards psychological growth and social maturity.

Wade, Cairney and Pevalin (2002) and Nolan, Flynn and Garber (2003) saw the adolescent years as a particularly vulnerable period for the onset of depression, with negative and stressful peer interactions and relationships salient predictors of depressive symptoms. Hodges, Boivin, Viraro and Bokowski (1999) highlighted that positive peer relationships served as a protective factor for psychological well-being. Duck (1991) argued that

friends imparted a sense of self-worth and belonging, and provided both physical and psychological support. As Rubin, Chen, Coplan, Buskirk and Wojslawowicz (2005) emphasised, positive peer relationships were of critical importance in the formation of self-identity.

Iwaniec et al. (2006) stressed that adolescents' sense of well-being could be enhanced if they were able to develop and maintain rewarding friendships, which acted as a significant protective factor against adversity, providing social support and enhancement of self-esteem and positive self-evaluation.

## Positive institutions and organisations

The second fundamental aspect of positive psychology is the understanding of positive institutions. In conjunction with the family and peer group, the institutions and organisations that young people engage with and in can provide opportunities for promoting individual strengths and well-being. Positive Youth Development programmes in particular have been identified as a positive institution. "Positive Youth Development" (PYD) is a term generally used to describe interventions that endeavour to promote a range of competencies in young people.

Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray and Foster (1998) proposed that it was possible to influence an adolescent's trajectory toward positive outcomes and enhanced well-being by exposing them to appropriate developmental supports and opportunities. According to Duckworth, Steen and Seligman (2005), participation in positive institutions such as Positive Youth Development programmes engendered pleasure, engagement and meaning for the individual, all vital ingredients for the development of personal strengths and well-being in young people. Such positive programmes, by promoting mutual help and trust, contributed to what Putnam (2000) called 'social capital', the increased

well-being of both the individual and the community. Pittman et al. (2001) agreed that young people should be actively encouraged to avail of such resources and opportunities to foster and develop personal competencies and strengths.

## Positive individual attributes

The third principal concern of positive psychology is the understanding of the positive individual attributes that promote human strengths and well-being. Positive psychology is based on the belief that it is possible to build and advance human strengths by developing and nurturing positive attributes, which in turn buffer the individual against mental health difficulties.

While many attributes can be credited with enhancing personal well-being, for the purpose of this current research, the attributes of hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being are examined.

## Hope

Historically, the psychological attribute of hope has been recognised as one of the key aspects of positive psychology and well-being. Hope has been defined as the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best. A core objective of Positive Youth Development programmes is to nurture and enhance such positive attributes in young people.

According to Snyder (1994), hope has two main components: agency thinking and pathways thinking. Agency thinking is an individual's ability to strive for goals regardless of obstacles, reflected in statements such as "I can achieve this" or "I will get there". Pathways thinking is an individual's ability to see a way through obstacles to achieve a desired goal,

illustrated by a statement such as "I will find a way to complete this task".

Seligman (2000) believed that depression in a young person at genetic risk can be prevented by nurturing their attributes of optimism and hope. Research indicates that the prevalence of depression is now ten times that which it was in the 1960s, and that depression strikes at a much younger age, with first episodes reported in adolescence. Given the prevalence of depression and despair and hopelessness in young people, positive youth programmes can be useful in providing adolescents with additional relationship opportunities to help them develop and expand their levels of hope. Snyder (2000) suggested that with guidance from others and the setting of personal goals, young people could increase their capacity for hopeful thinking. The theory that hope inspires greater personal well-being has been borne out in research (Snyder, 1994; Arnau et al., 2010; Snyder, Simpson, Michael and Cheavens, 2001; Onwuegbuzie and Snyder, 2000; Stajkovic, 2006; Frankl, 1966; Afflect and Tennen, 1996; and others.)

## Self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's perceived competence, the belief in his or her capabilities to produce desired effects by their own actions. An individual's sense of self-efficacy plays an important role in how they approach goals, tasks and challenges. According to Bandura, individuals with high self-efficacy believe they can perform and master challenges; they view difficult tasks as opportunities to be embraced rather than avoided.

Parents and families are the first crucial agents in facilitating the growth of self-efficacy. As children grow, other institutions, such as schools and teachers, clubs and organisations, also become influential in the development of self-efficacy. Most adolescents

and adults have the potential to change their levels of self-efficacy.

Research has proven that self-efficacy levels affected positive emotion and mental health (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña and Schwarzer, 2005; Bancila and Mittelmark, 2005; Bandura, 1997; Maddux and Meier, 1995; Williams, 1995).

As research indicates that self-efficacy is a learned attribute affected by experiences, participation in Positive Youth Development programmes can provide invaluable opportunities for young people to acquire or enhance their levels of self-efficacy through encouragement and achievement.

## Self-esteem

The term self-esteem is used to reflect a person's overall evaluation of his or her own worth. According to Coopersmith (1967), it is the feeling of self-worth and value that results when the self judges itself. Rosenberg (1965) believed that people with high self-esteem had a favourable view of themselves as competent, likeable, attractive and successful.

Self-esteem has been consistently found to be a powerful predictor of happiness and life satisfaction (Diener and Diener, 1995; Baumeister, 2005) and an important resource for mental and physical health (Steele, 1988; Lopez and Snyder, 2009).

Leary (1999) highlighted that self-esteem played an important role in maintaining the social relationships so vital to psychological health and well-being, suggesting that self-esteem was highly sensitive to social inclusion and exclusion and that affording young people opportunities to mix and integrate was an important contributor to their positive mental health and positive self-evaluation.

## Happiness

Happiness can be broadly defined as a positive emotional state, a sense of emotional well-being and contentment. Aristotle (350 BC) believed that each individual's happiness was determined by his or herself. He enshrined happiness as a central purpose of human life and a goal in itself. Diener (2000) agreed that for most people, happiness was an emotional state to be aimed for.

There are two main theories of happiness. The hedonic view of happiness, according to Ryan and Deci (2001), is that the primary goal of life is the pursuit of personal happiness and pleasure. Waterman (1990) defined happiness as the enjoyment of life and its pleasures. Diener (1984) studied the hedonic perspective through his work on happiness, or as he called it, subjective well-being, which looks beyond short-term or physical pleasure to life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect and relative absence of negative affect. Some theorists refer to these as the three components of happiness.

Significant evidence is available that levels of happiness are influenced positively by social affiliation, socialising, investment in goal pursuit, passive and active leisure, and direct attempts at happiness, and are increased by good interpersonal relationships (Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006; and Froh, Kashdan, Yurkewicz, Fan, Glowacki and Allen, 2010). Diener, Lyubomirsky and King (2005) found that happy people were more successful in virtually every domain of life.

Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) indicated that happiness levels could be increased by engaging in what they called positive activity interventions (PAIs), self-directed positive behaviours intended to increase positive thoughts and positive feelings, and contribute to enhanced well-being. Carr (2011) believed that group-based activities encouraged interaction with others and helped to increase happiness levels by meeting such needs as affiliation, altruism, excitement and achievement. Positive Youth

Development programmes can provide young people with the framework to create their own PAIs, and thereby assist in developing personal strengths and well-being.

## Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being has been described as a helpful framework for categorising human functioning. Ryff (1989) argued that well-being was more than happiness; she devised a psychological well-being scale which sought to measure self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others, all of which, she said, reflect human resilience, positive functioning, personal strengths and mental health.

Extensive research using Ryff's psychological well-being scale has found a correlation between positive relationships with others and overall psychological well-being (Cooper, Okamura and MacNeill, 1995; Vleioras and Bosma, 2005)

## Conclusion

Maddux (2008) highlighted that positive psychology emphasised the development of positive human attributes as a predictor of psychological mental health. For young people, positive relationships are of crucial importance to their well-being. The evidence highlights that the development of positive relationships helps to build psychological attributes, buffering young people against psychological distress and contributing to their overall well-being. In addition, there is growing evidence of the effectiveness of Positive Youth Development programmes in promoting the well-being of young people by providing an optimum environment for the enhancement of positive psychological attributes and strengths.

# Chapter Four: Positive Youth Development

## Origins - Historical Context

The Positive Youth Development movement emerged in late twentieth-century America, in response to rising juvenile crime rates in the 1950s and 1960s. The increased rates of youth disorder coincided with changes in American family structure and society, including rising divorce rates, greater numbers of single-parent families, and more families living in poverty.

Initial interventions and treatment programmes were aimed at specific youth groups and specific problems in an attempt to curb rising youth crime and problem behaviours. In the last three decades, prevention programmes materialised, with the rationale of trying to prevent, rather than treat, problem behaviours.

A major shift of focus occurred when information from longitudinal research became available, which identified predictors of problem behaviours in young people. This sparked a second wave of prevention programmes where empirically identified predictors of adolescent behaviour (e.g., drug use or teenage pregnancy) were utilised in the development of specific programmes.

In the 1980s, there was a shift to examine the co-occurrence of problem behaviours (Catalano et.al., 2002). Some theorists called for the examination of common predictors of multiple problem behaviours, while other practitioners sought to examine factors that promoted positive youth behaviours. From these dual perspectives, prevention science emerged which sought to prevent or curb human psychological difficulties before they occurred. These scientists urged policy-makers to expand the brief of prevention programmes to include aspects aimed at promoting positive behaviours.

## Emergence of Positive Youth Development

Prevention science provided empirical support and substantial evidence that many youth outcomes, both positive and negative, were affected by the same risk and protective factors. Evidence further showed (Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992) that risk and protective factors were found across family, peer, school and community environments.

The concept of Positive Youth Development emerged, according to Lerner (2005), from an interest among developmental scientists in using developmental systems models of human behaviour and development for understanding the plasticity of human brain development, as well as understanding the importance of relations between individuals and their real world ecological settings. Developmental systems theorists rejected the reductionist idea that a young person's development was determined by set, or fixed, genetic influences; rather they emphasised the plasticity of human development. Their work was based on the premise that an individual can continue to grow, develop and improve throughout his or her life. Gottlieb's (1997) research in evolutionary biology and comparative psychology acknowledged the possibility and potential of systematic change through the plasticity of the adolescent and young adult brain.

Damon (1990), along with other developmental systems theorists, argued that humans were biologically hard-wired from birth towards positive behaviours and were predisposed to interacting positively with life. He suggested that all youth programmes should harness that biological disposition for positive interaction. Nisan (1996, p83) wrote, "If people see a value or a way of life as essential to their identity, then they feel that they ought to act accordingly". This process would lead to, as Seligman (2002) called it, altruistic social

behaviour. As Youniss and Yates (1997) showed, character-building and community-service programmes triggered positive development when they succeeded in engaging the young person, thereby promoting the development of the self and the sense of moral identity.

Affording young people opportunities for trying new roles and taking on additional responsibilities, through which they learn to contribute more efficiently and successfully, was of paramount importance to their development (Catalano et al., 2002; McNeeley, Nonnemaker and Blum, 2002; Benson, 1990; and Pittman et al., 2001). Such opportunities facilitated problem-solving and the development of solution-focused strategies. Furthermore, they facilitated and nurtured enhanced participation and connection with peers, adults and community. With the development of increased positive social behaviour, the likelihood of anti-social behaviour decreased. Empirical evidence also shows that increasing Positive Youth Development programmes and promoting character strengths in young people were likely to reduce or prevent the development of problem behaviours. Multiple research findings (U.S. National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2002; Pittman and Fleming, 1991; Chalk and Philips, 1996; and Weissberg and Greenberg, 1997) suggested that models of Positive Youth Development programmes held the key to both health promotion and prevention of problem behaviours.

The great variation in design, approach, and focus of different youth programmes presented significant challenges for definition and evaluation purposes. Furthermore, there was no agreement on specific psychometric measures to measure human strengths or accurately capture the effects of participation in Positive Youth Development programmes.

## **Definition of Positive Youth Development**

In the last decade a general consensus has emerged from this confusion and complexity on what defines a Positive Youth Development programme. "Positive Youth Development" is a term generally used to describe interventions that endeavour to promote a range of competencies in young people. According to Durlak et al. (2008), Positive Youth Development refers to intentional efforts of other people, communities, government agencies and schools to provide opportunities for young people to develop their interests, skills and abilities into adulthood. While Positive Youth Development programmes vary tremendously in scope, design and duration, all Positive Youth Development interventions directly target some aspects of youth competency, with support from parents, teachers, mentors, communities, or some combination of these. Although the word 'youth' can be used synonymously with 'child', 'adolescent', or 'young person', the phrase 'youth development' or 'Positive Youth Development' is usually used, in the scientific literature and by practitioners who work with young people, to refer to programmes designed to optimise these processes (University of Minnesota Extension Centre for Youth Development, 2005).

"Positive Youth Development" therefore is a term which describes any services and supports organised for young people, aimed at assisting them in acquiring skills and competencies to enhance their personal strengths and well-being.

## **The Philosophy of Positive Youth Development**

The underlying philosophy of Positive Youth Development programmes is the belief that, with adequate nurturing and encouragement, all young people have the capability to become competent adults and 'social assets', i.e., able to make positive

contributions to society as a young person, and later as an adult.

Alperstein and Raman (2003) stated that risk factors can trigger a psychological disorder or aggravate an already existing disorder. The way to minimise risk factors is to increase and develop protective factors. Scales et al. (2000) agreed, stating that the positive experiences in youth development programmes could help to negate risky behaviour and consequent problems, and increase the young person's levels of resilience. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (2000) defined resilience as the interplay between risk and protective factors for the child, the family and the community.

The importance of offering a selection of programmes to meet the differing needs of young people was noted by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003). They believed that the availability of a range of programmes was necessary to meet the differing needs of young people, affording them the opportunity to commit to one of their choosing. Seligman (2002) also stated that a monolithic approach to Positive Youth Development must be avoided. Bandura (1995), Hawkins and Weis (1985) and Ladd and Mize (1983) proposed that Positive Youth Development programmes should use a variety of methods to enable young people to learn to manage their emotions, understand the perspective of others, formulate and work towards personal goals, make decisions, develop enhanced respect for self and others, and develop the ability to solve problems and manage conflicts successfully.

A collaborative approach was advocated by Weissberg, Kumpfer and Seligman (2003), pointing out that young people achieved more when the adults in their lives worked in collaboration. They called for schools, healthcare workers and policymakers to work together in a united way to enhance the well-being of young people by developing strengths-based programmes that promoted the development of skills and built social

and emotional competences. Lerner (2004) highlighted the potential for systemic change, both for the individual and for society, when agencies worked together to advance the well-being of a population.

The Positive Youth Development movement holds that those working with young people must do more than simply reduce risk; they must focus on building the assets and capabilities of young people to enable them to advance positively throughout life. Dotterweich of Cornell University (2006) summarised the main differences between traditional youth services and Positive Youth Development programmes. She identified traditional youth services as focussing on problems, reactive to issues, and targeted youth as recipients of expert-led prescriptive programmes. She saw positive youth development programmes as focussing on positive outcomes as well as problems, proactive and universal, community-based and community-responsive, with active youth participation.

Benson (2003) provided a five-component framework to understand and promote the concept of Positive Youth Development.

1. The aim of Positive Youth Development programmes is of mutually beneficial relationships between people and their environments;
2. This mutually beneficial relationship has its origins in integrated biological and cultural heritage;
3. In action, this model provides opportunities for mutually beneficial supportive relationships between flourishing individuals and social institutions;
4. This theory encourages and rewards the aspirations of young people who wish to contribute to others and society;
5. Finally, this idealised relationship between individuals and society may be achieved through promoting the positive development of a young

person into a flourishing person in a thriving society.

## Features of Positive Youth Development programmes

### Structural features of Positive Youth Development programmes

Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a) suggested that any Positive Youth Development programme must have three key structural components:

- a. Programme goals that young people could understand and endorse and could aspire to reach. The goals must promote and nurture positive development in all participants and acknowledge the need to set supportive and challenging goals for all participants.
- b. A programme atmosphere characterised by hope, and nourished by the staff and members of the programme in the belief that young people are resources and valuable members of society. Ideally the programme atmosphere should resemble that of a caring and supportive family.
- c. Programme activities that provide both formal and informal opportunities to develop and expand participants' interests and talents. The programme activities should also offer participants opportunities to practice their newly acquired skills in a safe and supportive environment while gaining confidence and a sense of achievement.

Lerner (2004) talked about three further essential "ingredients", the "Big Three" constituents necessary in youth development programmes to enhance well-being in young people:

1. Opportunity for commitment - the young person must be positively sustained for a prolonged period of time - ideally a year, according to Rhodes (2002);

2. Adult-youth relationship;
3. Skill-building activities and opportunities to practice these skills.

### Operational features of Positive Youth Development programmes

Two main operational models have emerged from evidence-based research in the past decade which list the operational features of Positive Youth Development programmes. The U.S. National Research Council (2002) identified eight processes, or "active ingredients", and Catalano et al. (2002) listed 15 "operational objectives" or "essential elements".

#### The "Active Ingredients" model

The U.S. National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine's Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (2002) stated that personal and social assets that contributed to adolescent well-being and the transition into successful adulthood could be organised into four general categories: physical and mental health, cognitive development, psychological and emotional development, and social development. From a list of personal and pro-social assets, they drew up a provisional list of eight features that described the processes or "active ingredients" in youth programmes that facilitated Positive Youth Development: physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for enhanced efficacy, opportunities for skill-building and integration of family, school and community.

#### The Fifteen Objectives model

The second operational definition of Positive Youth Development programmes, the Fifteen Objectives Model, was developed by Catalano et al. (2002) through literature reviews and consensus meetings of leading scientists. The objectives identified were the promotion of bonding, the fostering of resilience, the promotion of social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and moral competences, the fostering of self-

determination, positive behaviour, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, pro-social norms and pro-social involvement.

## Outcome goals of Positive Youth Development programmes

### The "Five Cs" Outcome Model

Five key "latent constructs", or outcomes, of successful Positive Youth Development programmes were introduced by Little (1993) and expanded on by Eccles and Gootman (2002), Lerner (2004) and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003b). These five outcome components of youth programmes fundamental to successful Positive Youth Development became collectively known as the "Five Cs": Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character and Caring and Compassion. Pitman offered the model of the "Five Cs" as a framework for understanding Positive Youth Development outcomes.

These "Five Cs", according to Lerner (2004) and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), were consistent with the positive outcomes of youth development programmes. They further suggested that being in possession of the "Five Cs" was consistent with "thriving youth". When a young person possessed the "Five Cs" over a period of time, they would be en route towards what Csikszentmihalyi and Rathuade (1998) and Csikszentmihalyi (2006) termed "idealised adulthood", where an individual was an active agent in his or her development, and in turn actively contributed to their family, community and society.

When the "Five Cs" were present in a young person, according to Lerner (2005), there emerged a sixth "C", that of Contribution: that is, a young person enacted behaviours indicative of the "Five Cs" by contributing positively to self, family, community and ultimately, society. Such contributions were envisioned as having a philosophical component, i.e., the young person possessed behaviours consistent with a sense of moral and civic duty (Lerner, Dowling et al. 2003).

Theorists of Positive Youth Development over the past ten years, in particular Damon (2004) and Lerner (2005) have stated that the Five Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, as well as caring and compassion) emerged in young people when their individual goals were achieved within a framework of supporting adults in families, schools and communities.

### Values in Action (VIA) - Inventory of Virtues and Strengths (VIA-IS)

Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a classification system of human strengths in order to respond to two questions: How could one define the concepts of "strength" and "highest potential"? And secondly, how could one tell if a Positive Youth Development programme had succeeded in meeting its goals? They identified six overarching virtues, Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence. These positive traits or qualities in an individual were deemed to be morally good, and thus admirable. The six virtues contained twenty-four character strengths known as "psychological ingredients" that defined the virtues. These include such attributes as perspective, perseverance (not giving up), kindness, teamwork, self-regulation and hope. These character strengths are all similar in that they involve the gaining, expansion and use of knowledge, but they are also all distinct. Character strengths are regarded as dimensional traits, in that they exist in different degrees in different individuals.

The Values in Action (VIA) Inventory of Virtues and Strengths (VIA-IS) developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) has become a common framework for practitioners working in positive psychology. Snyder and Lopez (2007) called the VIA-IS the antithesis of the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Health and Disorders (DSM).

Until this century, psychologists did not focus on long-term protective factors against human suffering and mental illness. Peterson and Seligman (2004)

advocated in their Values in Action (VIA) Inventory that, through the promotion and development of human virtues and strengths, an individual would amass protective factors that would act as buffers against psychological difficulties and enhance well-being. These are: Wisdom and Knowledge (including creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, love of learning, and perspective); Courage (including bravery, perseverance, honesty and vitality); Humanity (including love, kindness and social intelligence); Justice (including teamwork, fairness and leadership); Temperance (including forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation); and Transcendence (including appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour and spirituality).

## Review of Literature on Positive Youth Development

An extensive empirical review was conducted on literature post 1985 to 2010 on research into Positive Youth Development programmes. The findings from the empirical review indicate that Positive Youth Development programmes generally produce positive outcomes for participants, irrespective of their gender, age, or social or economic background. Earlier Positive Youth Development programmes tended to focus on prevention or reducing problematic behaviours, and the positive effects from these programmes tended to diminish over time. The newer programmes, those that focussed on building participants' individual strengths and developmental assets, have been reported to have longer-lasting positive effects, i.e., the positive gains that were made through participation were sustained for longer, and often into early adulthood, predicting positive adult well-being.

However, these findings need to be considered in balance with the limitations often associated with these types of studies, typically concerning the research methodology. A minority of the studies

reviewed used standardised, established measures, although some were modified and abbreviated, thus compromising the psychometric properties. There was often an over-dependency on self-reports from programme participants, when greater insight could have been gained from using a mixed methods approach. There was also a dearth of control procedures in place, further attenuating issues with small sample sizes and limited diversity. The evaluative procedures were often universal, undermining differences within the sample and programme implementation. Moreover, some studies displayed high attrition rates. Data collection was also in a limited timeframe, normally within the first year of programme implementation, meaning that long-term benefits of the programmes were hard to determine.

## Critique of Positive Youth Development

Recent years have seen the identification of certain inherent problems in positive youth development programmes (Catalano et al., 2004). One of the issues of concern arises with governments that have a policy of allocating funding to programmes which can demonstrate empirical evidence of their efficacy. This can lead to the compromise or manipulation of the true objective programme outcomes, as organisations strive to make their programmes appear to be more successful. One method of achieving this is by manipulating the participant selection, choosing predominantly those most at-risk, who will be more likely to show significant gains of higher magnitude, thereby distorting the 'universal' element of the programmes. This has a knock-on effect of drawing away from the ideological aims of the positive youth development programmes. In contrast to the stated aims of the programmes to steer away from social stigmatisation, they build on the social pathological model. Currently in Ireland, this model of funding does not prevail. However, in recent years there has been a change of focus in

government thinking in the direction of seeking “Value for Money” and proof of efficacy.

Catalano and colleagues (2004) also note that organisations are failing to provide follow-up data at programme termination, posing a further limitation to the identification of the long-term efficacy of the programmes. Furthermore, the pressure of efficacy-based funding also means that organisations can become overly-focused on activities with proven outcomes, rather than more reciprocal long-term processes such as building relationships, enhancing empathic responses and building altruistic social behaviours. All in all, the current funding practice of the American government can lead to a reductive view of positive youth development programmes. Not only can the focus of these organisations potentially be compromised, but the true value of these programmes can be diluted and difficult to determine.

Additionally, Jeffs and Smiths (2002) argue that positive youth development programmes have become so overly focused on the structural elements of their organisations and related targets that they are ignoring the basis of all youth work, such as building relationships and allowing reciprocal processes to develop. Doyle (1999) argues that the youth workers involved in positive youth development programmes are increasingly becoming divisible into those who view youth work as a ‘profession’ and those who see it a ‘calling’.

The other main problems inherent in positive youth development programmes are mainly related to evaluative processes, and are such that Catalano and colleagues (2004) have argued for a universal standardised set of outcome measures to identify if the outcome findings attributed to these programmes are consistent and replicable. Moreover, they argued that evaluations must contain sufficient narrative information and quantitative data to enable independent assessment of the programme.

## Conclusion

A review of the empirical literature indicates that the positive youth development movement takes a holistic approach to the young person. It holds that those working with young people must do more than simply reduce risk; they must focus on building the developmental assets and capabilities of young people. The PYD movement maintains that young people, with the help of peers and adults, through engaging developmental activities, can build individual strengths and increase personal assets. The evidence indicates that over time, these acquired strengths will buffer the young person and help him or her to conquer difficulties and challenges, and thus to thrive.

From the literature review, it is clear that no single programme can serve the needs of all young people. The research also suggests that programmes for young people that involve more than one youth domain (schools, communities, families, etc.) provide the greatest opportunity for young people to acquire personal and social assets.

## Chapter Five: Gaisce–The President’s Award

### Origins

The development of Gaisce–The President’s Award arose from the work of Kurt Hahn (1886-1974), a seminal educator and founder of what has become known as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. In many ways, Hahn’s vision of enhancing youth development was ahead of its time, and was a forerunner to what is now known as the Positive Youth Development movement. His motto was “There is more in you than you think.” Hahn devoted his life to helping people find their inner strength; he believed that young people needed encouragement and support to enable them to reach and fulfil their true potential.

Hahn believed that adolescents possessed an innate decency and strong moral fibre, but they were vulnerable to corruption. Hahn believed that a programme that actively encouraged young people to seek outdoor adventure, to acquire skills, and to gain in physical fitness, would help them to develop as human beings and enhance their sense of civic virtue. The programme he developed went through a number of structural changes and expansions (among them, the Moray Badge and the County Badge) until eventually, by 1965, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards were amalgamated into a single programme for young people, boys and girls, aged 14 to 21 years (extended to 25 years in 1980).

### The International Award Association (IAA)

Both the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Gaisce–The President’s Award programmes currently operate under the auspices of the International Award Association (also known as the Duke of Edinburgh Award International Association or IAA). The IAA was founded in 1988 to co-ordinate the development and

expansion of the Duke of Edinburgh Award worldwide.

Ireland has adopted the name Gaisce–The President’s Award, but its structure and components were similar to those of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and are now those of the IAA. Today approximately 850,000 young people participate in similar award programmes in over 130 countries worldwide, all under the auspices of the IAA.

The programmes of the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Gaisce–The President’s Award follow the philosophy of the IAA. The IAA Handbook lists four components which provide a framework to encourage physical activity, mental challenge, individual perseverance, teamwork and interaction with other people. The components are Service, Skills, Physical and Recreation, and Adventurous Journey. In Gaisce–The President’s Awards, these are known as Community Involvement, Personal Skill, Physical Recreation, and Adventure Journey.

According to the IAA Handbook, participants must challenge themselves in order to enhance their own personal growth and development, must appreciate the needs of other people and strive to help them, and must reflect on the role they can play in helping their community.

The Handbook states that participation in such a programme can contribute to the positive development of adolescents, helping them to become more altruistic and caring, while enhancing their own individual strengths.

The Handbook further states that young people should develop a number of overall “benefits”, or strengths, from participating in the Award programme. These include self-belief and self-confidence, a positive and realistic self-image, an independent and self-motivating attitude, a sense of responsibility, a connection to the broader society,

new or improved interests, skills and abilities, a willingness to try new things, the development of new friendships and relationships with peers and adults, the ability to make and enact a plan, the opportunity to development of lifelong interests, and the enhancement of team skills and life skills.

Additionally, the IAA Handbook lists distinct benefits to be accrued from participation in each of the four components. For example, the Service component helps to give a greater understanding of others' needs and increases empathy, among others. The Adventurous Journey component promotes teamwork and improves leadership skills. The Skills component aims to increase self-confidence, motivation and time management. Physical recreation helps to improve fitness and develops perseverance, self-discipline and self-motivation. The IAA Handbook also indicates that spanning across all components are the development of social skills through on-going interaction with others, and a sense of enjoyment.

## **The Early Years of Gaisce–The President's Award**

In 1984, the National Youth Policy Committee, chaired by Mr Justice Costello, published an influential report on youth services in Ireland. The Committee had been asked for suggestions as to how the government could assist all young people to become self-reliant, responsible and active participants in [Irish] society. The Costello Report, as it became known, signified a shift in thinking regarding the purpose of youth work, as it prioritised the empowerment of young people and advocated that they should become active participants in their own lives and in Irish society. The report highlighted that young Irish people needed to be able to contribute to their own development, education, family life, community and social development.

The report advocated for the formation of an independent national youth service which would

provide young people with the developmental and educational experiences that could equip them to play an active part in Irish society.

In December 1985 the Government produced a policy document called in "In Partnership with Youth" which acknowledged the democratic right of all young people to participate fully in Irish society through practical and coordinated programmes, and established the need to develop a National Youth Service to cater to the needs of all young Irish people.

Between 1981 and 1982, the Irish government sanctioned the formation of a national award scheme for young people aged between 15 and 25 years, to be called Gaisce–The President's Award which was eventually launched in October 1985 by President Hillery, the Award's founding patron. The President's Award Council was appointed to establish the Gaisce Award Scheme. Initially the Award was introduced in five geographical locations (Monaghan, Galway, Kilkenny, Cork City and North Dublin), each with 60 participants, both male and female, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. By the following year 1986, the Award was taken up in 26 counties, with 3000 participants. In 1999, the Gaisce scheme was awarded charitable status.

## **Philosophy**

The primary objective of Gaisce–The President's Award programme is to establish and administer non-competitive Awards for all young people, but particularly those most in need of opportunity and inspiration. Participants would receive the Award in recognition of personal achievement in worthwhile fields of endeavour or performance, with the object of promoting the positive self-development of those young people and the betterment of their communities.

## Mission

Gaisce’s mission is to contribute to the development of all young people of Ireland between the ages of 15 and 25 years, but particularly those most in need of opportunity and inspiration, through the achievement of personal challenges. It is a non-competitive award programme which invites young people to set challenging goals for themselves. The Gaisce programme aims to contribute to the personal development of these young Irish people through individual challenges and achievement.

## Operation

Participants voluntarily choose to participate in the non-competitive programme, which has four components (see Table 5.1) and is open to all young people aged between 15 and 25 years.

Table 5.1: Components of Gaisce–The President’s Award

Components of Gaisce - The President’s Award	
<b>1. Community Involvement</b>	e.g. Supporting older adults within their community.
<b>2. Personal Skill</b>	e.g. Learning to play the guitar, karate classes, etc.
<b>3. Physical Recreation</b>	e.g. Swimming, playing hurling, basketball etc.
<b>4. Adventure Journey</b>	e.g. Prepare and complete a hike of Achill island

All young people have an equal opportunity to earn the award once the basic requirements are met. The Award encourages young people to set and achieve, in consultation with an adult volunteer, called President’s Award Leaders (PALs), a demanding challenge for themselves in four different component areas and to persevere in achieving this challenge. The participant earns their award once their agreed challenges have been achieved to the best of their ability, over the designated period of time, under the four required categories.

The Award is offered at three levels; Bronze, Silver and Gold, with a longer designated timeframe to each higher level, ranging from 26 weeks to 78 weeks.

Table 5.2: Structure of the Gaisce Award programme

	Bronze	Silver	Gold
<b>Minimum Age</b>	15+ years	16+ Years	17+ Years
<b>Minimum Duration for each Component (Community Involvement, Personal Skill, Physical Recreation)</b>	26 weeks	52 weeks	78 weeks
<b>Credit for Previous Award Holders</b>	—	26 weeks for Bronze Award Holder	52 weeks for Silver Award Holder

At each Award level, participants are allocated a President’s Award Leader (PAL). These PALs, currently numbering 1200, are volunteers trained by Gaisce staff. PALs act as mentors to support, motivate and monitor the participants on their path to completing their stated, agreed, goals. Agreeing those goals, and on-going monitoring is done through collaborative discussion, regular progress reports and the writing up and signing off on log books and completion sheets. Each Award has its own particular log book. The PALs do the final sign-off on the Bronze and Silver Awards. In the case of Gold Awards, the log books and completion sheets are also verified by a member of the Gaisce staff before the Award is approved.

Gaisce’s Annual Report 2010 indicates that since its establishment in 1985, approximately 100,000 awards have been earned by young Irish people, coming from a wide variety of economic, social and educational backgrounds across the island of Ireland. The Bronze Award category attracts the largest number of participants annually. Bronze participants are typically secondary school students who have completed their three-year Junior Certificate

programme, and are enrolled in the Fourth Year programme, known as "Transition Year", prior to the final two-year Leaving Certificate programme. Completion rate averaged 47.9% over the six-year period 2005-2010.

## Chapter Six: Research Results (Quantitative and Qualitative Findings)

This chapter presents the results of the Quantitative and Qualitative components of the research, i.e., a “Mixed Method” design. “Quantitative” refers to the systematic empirical investigation of data via statistical and mathematical data analysis and “Qualitative” refers to the gathering of an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, through the use of interviews, focus groups and other such methods.

The five questionnaires utilised in the quantitative component were analysed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) as four of the questionnaires originated in the United States using an American population, and one in Germany using a German population. This research sought to investigate if the five scales yielded the same component structure as suggested by their authors when tested on an Irish population. Following the initial Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed on one of the questionnaires.

The data from both sets of the Bronze sample (Gaisce participants and control participants) collected at Time 1 (pre-participation) were utilised as part of the analyses in both the exploratory factor analyses and the confirmatory factor analyses. This total Bronze sample, which consisted of 647 (N=647) secondary school students, was employed to determine the factor structure and reliability of the respective questionnaires. There were 362 females in the sample, representing 56% of the total sample, while the male participants numbered 285 (44%). The mean age of the total sample was 15.89 years, with males ( $\bar{x} = 16.03$ ) presenting as older than the females ( $\bar{x} = 15.77$ ).

The total Bronze sample was randomly split into 2 sub-data sets using SPSS. Sample 1 consisted of the data of 319 students and sample 2 was comprised of the data from 328 students. The first grouping (n1=319), was utilised for all the exploratory factor analyses (EFA). 177 of this sample were female

(55.5%), while 142 participants were male (44.5%). The average age of the group, overall, was 15.78 years.

The second group, (n2 = 328) was utilised for all Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA). This group comprised of 185 females (56.4%) and 143 males (43.6%). The average age of this group was 16.03 years.

Results from the Exploratory Factor Analyses on an Irish population using the General Self-Efficacy Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Subjective Happiness Scale, and the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, support the original authors’ factor solutions; consequently, no further analysis was conducted. However, Exploratory Factor Analysis on the Children’s Hope Scale suggested that Confirmatory Factor Analysis was required. Based on Snyder’s original scale, item 2 should load exclusively onto the pathways subscale. However, for Irish adolescents, item 2 appeared to represent an ambiguous question. The modification indices in the CFA conducted suggested loading item 2 onto the agency subscale in addition to the pathways subscale. Consequently, the data was analysed using this configuration.

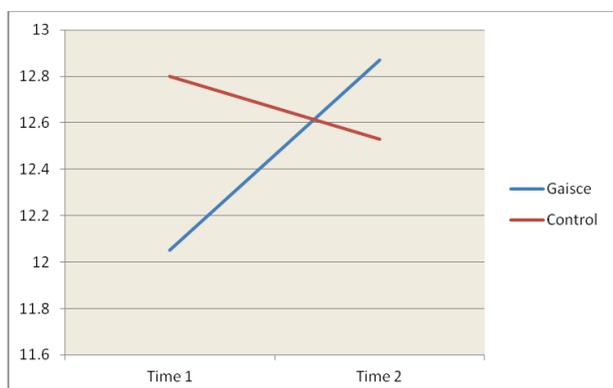
### Summary of results for Bronze Award Quantitative Study

The Gaisce Bronze Quantitative study consisted of 283 (N=283) participants in total. This study comprised of 152 (n=152) Gaisce Bronze participants and 131 (n=131) Bronze control participants. The Research Question asked was: Does participation in the Gaisce Bronze Award improve levels of Hope, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Happiness, and Psychological Well-being? It was addressed by 2 x 2 ANOVAs to compare Bronze Participants’ pre and post participation scores on the on the Hope, Self-

efficacy, Self-esteem, Hope, Happiness and Psychological Well-being scales, with a Control Group. The key findings were:

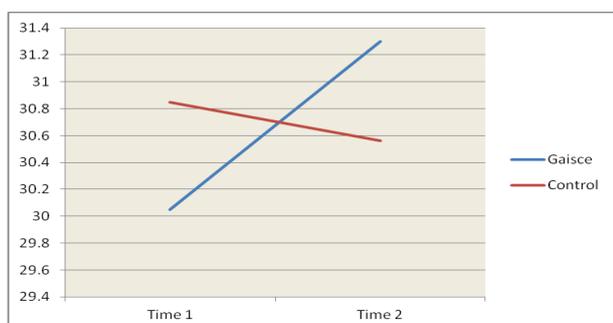
- The Hope Pathway Subscale demonstrated a significant interaction effect for Time x Group,  $F(1, 281) = 4.71, p = .03$ . A significant difference in scores was evident at Time 1, with the Gaisce Participants experiencing a significant increase in their score from Time 1 to Time 2 (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Estimated marginal means for Gaisce Bronze Participants and Control in the Hope Pathways subscale



- No significant interaction effects were present for the scores on the Overall Hope and Hope Agency Subscale.
- The results indicated a significant main interaction effect from the scores on the Self Efficacy Scale,  $F(1, 281) = 5.84, p = .016$  (Figure 6.2). Simple effects analysis indicated a significant increase for the Gaisce Bronze Participants from Time 1 to Time 2.

Figure 6.2: Estimated marginal means for Bronze Gaisce participants and Control in the Self-Efficacy Scale



- No significant interaction effects were present for the scores on the Self Esteem and Happiness Scale.
- A significant interaction effect present between Time and Group on the Scale of Psychological Well Being,  $F(1, 281) = 10.33, p = .001$ . Analysis indicated a significant difference between the groups at Time 1, with the Control Participants experiencing a significant decrease in scores over time.

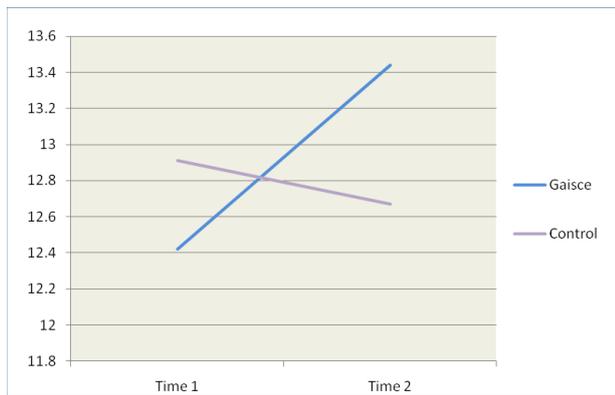
## Summary of results for Matched Bronze Participants

In order to minimise participant variability, ensure greater consistency between conditions and provide greater validity, participants from the Gaisce Bronze Quantitative (N=283), were matched based on gender, age, county of residence, location of residence, and parental occupation. Based on these criteria, 81 Gaisce Bronze participants and 81 Bronze Control participants were identified.

A summary of key findings pertaining to the results from the analysis of the Matched Bronze and Control Participants' scores on the Self-efficacy, Psychological Well-being, Hope, Self-esteem, Happiness scales is as follows.

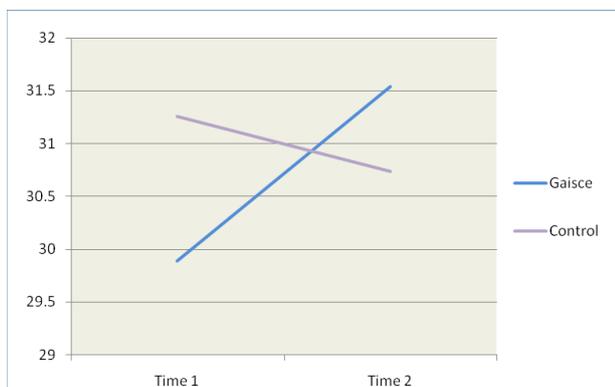
- No significant interaction effects were present for scores on the Overall Hope and Hope Agency Subscale.
- The Hope Pathway Subscale demonstrated a significant interaction effect for Time x Group,  $F(1, 160) = 6.22, p = .014$ , however, the effect size was small,  $\eta^2 = .036$ . A significant difference between the Matched Gaisce and Matched Control groups was present at Time 1 (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Estimated marginal means for matched Bronze Participants and matched Control Group in the Pathways subscale of the Children's Hope Scale



- A significant interaction effect occurred between Time and Group on the Self-efficacy Scale,  $F(1, 160) = 9.05$ ,  $p = .003$ , which emerged as a moderate effect size,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . A significant difference was present between the Matched Gaisce and Matched Control groups at Time 1. A significant increase in occurred for the Gaisce group's scores over time.

Figure 6.4: Estimated marginal means for Matched Bronze Participants and Matched Control Group in the Self-efficacy Scale



- No significant interaction effects were present for the scores on the Self-esteem and Happiness Scale.
- A significant interaction effect emerged between Time and Group on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being,  $F(1, 160) = 4.11$ ,  $p = .044$ , however, the effect size was small,  $\eta^2 = .025$ . A significant difference between the Matched Gaisce Participants and Matched Control groups was present at Time 1.

## Summary of results for Lowest Quartile Bronze Participants

A summary of key findings pertaining to the results from the analysis of the Lowest Quartile Bronze and Control Participants' scores on the Hope, Self-efficacy, Self-Esteem, Happiness and Psychological Well-being scales is as follows.

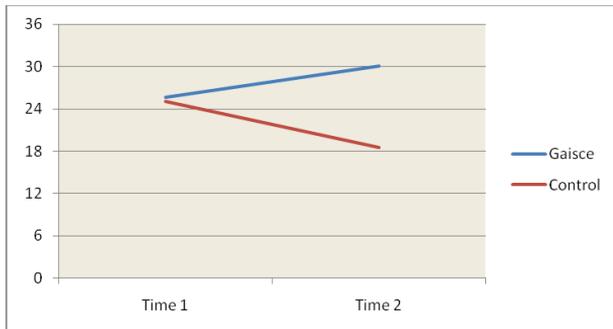
- A significant interaction effect for Time x Group was evident for the Hope Pathways Scores,  $F(1, 78) = 6.62$ ,  $p = .012$ , with a moderate effect size,  $\eta^2 = .078$ . Both groups experienced an increase in scores with the Gaisce group presenting with significantly different scores at Time 2 (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: Estimated marginal means for Lowest Quartile Bronze Participants and Control Group in the Pathways Subscale of the Children's Hope Scale



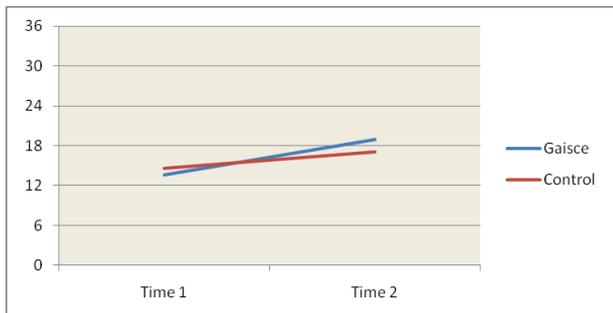
- No significant interaction effects were present for the scores on the Overall Hope and Hope Agency.
- The results indicated a significant interaction effect occurred between Time and Group,  $F(1, 78) = 92.87$ ,  $p = .001$ , on the Self-efficacy Scale, which emerged as a large effect size,  $\eta^2 = .544$ . The Gaisce group experienced a significant increase over time, while the Control Group experienced a significant decrease from Time 1 to Time 2 (see Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6: Estimated marginal means for lowest Quartile Bronze Participants and Control Group in the Self-efficacy Scale



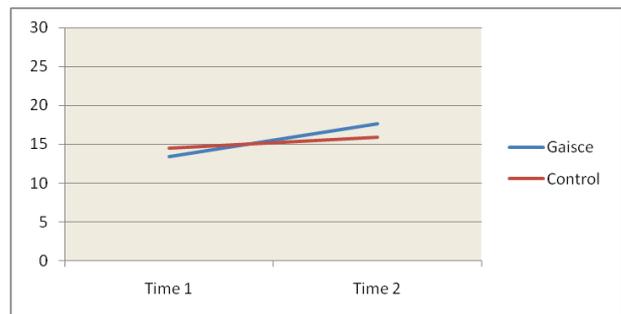
- A significant interaction effect was evident for Time x Group  $F(1, 72) = 4.90, p = .030$ , on the Self-esteem Scale which had a moderate effect,  $\eta^2 = .064$ . Both groups experienced a significant change over time and a significant difference was observed between the 2 groups at Time 2 (see Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7: Estimated marginal means for lowest quartile Gaisce and Control Participants on the Self-esteem Scale



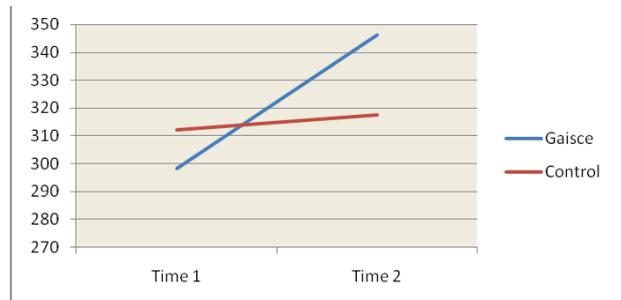
- A significant interaction between Time and Group was present on the Happiness Scale,  $F(1, 79) = 11.93, p = .001$ , which had a moderate effect,  $\eta^2 = .131$ . The lowest Quartile Gaisce Group experienced a significant increase from Time 1 to Time 2 (see Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8: Estimated marginal means for lowest quartile Gaisce and Control Participants on the Happiness Scale



- A significant interaction effect present between Time and Group on the Scale of Psychological Well-being,  $F(1, 70) = 10.38, p = .002$ , which had a moderate effect,  $\eta^2 = .129$ . Both groups experienced a significant increase in scores and a significant difference was observed between both groups at Time 2 (see Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9: Estimated marginal means for lowest quartile Gaisce and Control Participants on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being



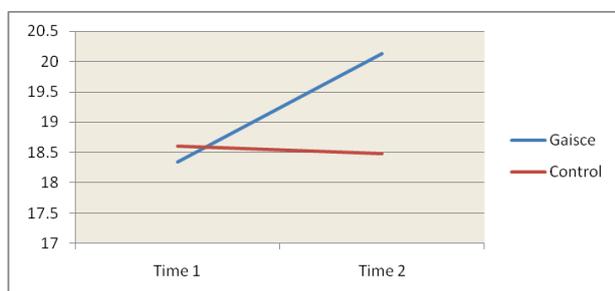
## Summary of findings for Gold Award Quantitative Study

A summary of key findings pertaining to the results from the analysis of the Gold Award Participants and Control Participants' scores on the Hope, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Happiness and Psychological Well-being scales are as follows.

- A significant interaction effect emerged between Group and Time on the Hope Pathways Subscale,  $F(1, 60) = 5.04, p = .029$ . The effect size was moderate,  $\eta^2 = .077$ . A significant difference was present between the Gaisce and Control groups at Time 2. A significant increase occurred for the

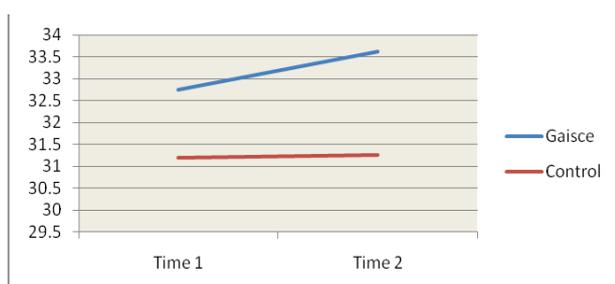
Gaisce participants' scores from Time 1 to Time 2 (6.10).

Figure 6.10: Estimated Marginal Means for Gold Participants on the Pathways Subtest of the Hope Scale



- No significant interaction effect was evident for Group x Time on either the Total Hope score,  $F(1,60) = 1.32, p = .25$ , or Hope Agency score,  $F(1, 60) = 2.03, p = .159$ .
- A significant interaction effect occurred between Group and Time on the Self-efficacy Scale,  $F(1, 60) = 5.10, p = .028$ , which emerged as a moderate effect,  $\eta^2 = .078$ . A significant difference between the Gaisce and Control groups' scores was present at Time 2 and a significant increase was present for the Gaisce Gold Participants over time (Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11: Estimated marginal means for Gold Participants on the Self-efficacy Scale



- No significant interaction effect was present between Group and Time on the Self-esteem Scale,  $F(1, 60) = .709, p = .403$ .
- The interaction effect for Group x Time on the Happiness Scale did not reach statistical significance,  $F(1, 60) = 0.30, p = .862$ ,

- No significant interaction effect was evident for Group x Time on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being,  $F(1, 60) = 3.01, p = .088$ .

## Summary of results for Bronze Award Qualitative Study

The qualitative component of this research aimed to obtain an understanding of participants' personal experiences of taking part in Gaisce–The President's Award programme. In particular this component sought to ascertain if participation in the programme acted as a catalyst for the development of psychological attributes and personal strengths in the individual.

To obtain information necessary to answer this question, Bronze and Gold Gaisce participants took part in focus groups and individual interviews. While the focus groups incorporated structured sequences to obtain specific information, the majority of the questions were general and open-ended to allow participants full rein to discuss their experience of their participation in the Award. Sixty-four participants took part in the Bronze focus groups. Participants came from six counties. There were 39 females (61% of the total group) and 25 males (39% of the total group).

Following detailed examination of the interview data, the data was analysed using thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis revealed a number of sub-themes which combined to give a number of overall, or main, themes relevant to the participants' experience of taking part in Gaisce - The President's Award.

In order to determine the reliability of the coding frame, an inter-rater reliability test was subsequently undertaken to determine the confidence in the themes selected by both the researcher and a fellow psychologist. Four of the eight Bronze transcripts (50%) were randomly selected for this purpose. The

kappa coefficient for inter-rater reliability was .71, indicating good rates of inter-rater reliability. Further observations were employed through the meticulous counting and coding of the participants' comments.

Using the guideline stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) the qualitative data from the focus groups and individual interviews was scanned for themes across the entire dataset, collecting data relevant to each potential theme. If these themes captured a common, recurring pattern, which was measured in terms of frequency of utterance, these 'sub-themes' were grouped together under an over-arching main theme. This focus on utterance frequency was based on a large body of discursive work which argues that in order to identify salient focuses in the minds of the participants, one should concentrate on the actual words that they are using to capture their experience (d'Andrade, 1991). The sub-theme, therefore, shares the same central organising concept as the main theme but focuses on only one aspect of the main theme (d'Andrade, 1991). The main theme is an umbrella term which encompasses the sub-themes (d'Andrade, 1991) (see Table 6.1).

A thematic analysis of the forty-five sub-themes of the Bronze participants' responses produced eleven main themes (see Table 6.1). The overall theme that emerged most frequently related to the development of positive relationships, with previous friends or with new acquaintances. The second most common main theme that arose for participants was the development of empathy-altruism as a result of participating in the programme. The third and fourth most prominent main themes related to positive thoughts and positive emotions respectively.

## Bronze Main Theme 1: Positive Relationships

The responses from the Bronze participants suggested that they learned more about their friends than they had previously been aware of. They often

Table 6.1: Main Themes from Bronze participants' Focus Groups

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Frequency	Theme Total
Positive relationships	Friendships	33	69
	Team membership	18	
	Opportunity to meet people	11	
	Enhanced relationships	4	
	Camaraderie	3	
Empathy-Altruism	Opportunity to help	31	50
	Greater patience	10	
	Volunteering	8	
	Understand others	1	
Positive Thoughts	Enhanced confidence	39	49
	Increased self-esteem	4	
	Increased self-worth	4	
	Increased self-belief	2	
Positive Emotions	Enjoyment	13	45
	Fun	16	
	Happy, happiness	10	
	Craic	6	
Mental Fortitude	Commitment	20	41
	Challenge	8	
	Push oneself	6	
	Effort	5	
	Motivation	2	
Self-Efficacy	Achievement	29	41
	Can do it	12	
Mentoring	Chance to coach	8	15
	Opportunity to teach	7	
Personal Growth	Opportunity to learn	7	14
	Greater maturity	4	
	Self-growth	3	
Fitness	Improved fitness	10	10
Skills	Enhanced skill(s)	9	9
Goals	Goal opportunities	7	7

highlighted the relationships they had developed and the opportunities to meet people. The participants also became more cognisant of the companionship and camaraderie generated by their respective relationships.

*"You know each other's, like, strengths and weaknesses at doing things and because you have got to know your friends better."*

*"We had to share tents with a load of people you normally wouldn't be that close to... People you would know, but not that well, now are better friends."*

*"It's great just to be able to kinda get on with all, all of them. It was great to be one big team,";*

*"... it was that sense of [short pause] being together with people that are [short pause] ten years older than you in some sense, but kind of being united, as a team.";*

*"I bonded with loads- of them. I didn't know them before Gaisce before my Community Skill. I really loved them and they're just so nice to be around- I don't know. It was really rewarding and [short pause] - really good."*

*"We used to not go into town but we go into like-we go into the city centre now and [short pause] and like we're actually with each other and we'll actually go in- We even go there Protestant areas. We now are each other friends, it is not just about religion anymore."*

## **Bronze Main Theme 2: Empathy-Altruism**

The second most common theme which emerged from the interviews with the Bronze participants was the increased compassion which some of them had developed as a result of participating in the Award. It appears that the participants increased their capacity to help others and become more patient. In addition, the interviewees reported that they were more likely

to volunteer and had cultivated a greater understanding of others as a result of their participation in Gaisce. Some examples given were:

*"Yeah I was working with little children aged 8 and 9 years old just helping them mount and just telling how to [short pause] hold the reins and stuff - they loved it- yeah and I loved helping them."*

*"I helped in a nursing home, the local nursing home. I'd clean, and I'd give soup and I'd kind of help them up and that [short pause], but I wouldn't have to bring them to the bathroom and stuff. I did help in lots of ways, 'cause I'd never really had contact with the elderly before, so it was a new experience for me."*

*"Yeah, you have to be patient, so patient I am a different person because of my volunteering with young people."*

## **Bronze Main Theme 3: Positive Thoughts**

The ability to think positively about themselves emerged as another main theme for the Bronze participants. A number of participants reported that they had become more confident as a result of their participation in The President's Award. In addition, the participants indicated that they had noticed improvements in their self-esteem, self-worth and self-belief.

*"Gaining confidence and stuff like that so to me that was the most [short pause] like beneficial part and the thing I learned most from about myself."*

*"The achievement is huge. And it does increase your self-esteem."*

*"It's just-just the achievement is-is a lot.... It's the one that you're-you're-you're like- you did something ... it adds to your self-worth."*

*"I-i-it adds to your self-worth. Like it made you feel [short pause] like you had self-worth. Your body, you're*

*good, finding there's something good about you-something you worked for."*

## **Bronze Main Theme 4: Positive Emotions**

In addition to positive thoughts, participation in Gaisce also appeared to have generated positive emotions for a number of the Bronze participants. In alluding to this theme, some of the Bronze participants expressed feelings of enjoyment, fun and craic, which led to an enhancement of positive emotions.

*"I did my work experience [short pause] in the primary school and I really enjoyed that - I mean [short pause] cherished it I loved it so much - it was enjoyable though, I really enjoyed it."*

*"I just felt like really [short pause] I always felt really happy doing it."*

*"We had great craic doing the Award, particularly the adventure bit - that was mighty fun!"*

## **Bronze Main Theme 5: Mental Fortitude**

The analysis of the interviews undertaken with the Bronze participants indicated that a number of those who participated had developed greater mental fortitude as a consequence taking part in the programme. It emerged that some of the participants developed a greater sense of commitment, and an enhanced capacity to challenge themselves. They also reported that they now realised how far they could motivate and push themselves.

*"You need a lot of commitment -to do the Gaisce because we started off with em [short pause] most of my class-doing the Gaisce and it ended up to be around three or something that completed."*

*"It's a lifetime achievement.....To challenge yourself to see how far you could push yourself to your limits and where your limits are."*

*"Because you're in a team you push yourself more cause you wanna [short pause] show your team that you can do it."*

*"It was very much like you know [short pause] you have to do everything yourself. You had to be-yeah, you had to. That's, I'd say, one of the reasons people d-pull out because they forget about it, they get bored, they just [short pause] don't bother, you know. But I think it has to be a self-motivated thing like. Unless you're willing to grow [pause] you know, you're not-going to."*

## **Bronze Main Theme 6: Self-efficacy**

The responses from the adolescents who participated in the Bronze Award programme suggested that a number of them believed that they had accomplished things as a result of participating in the scheme. It emerged that the Bronze participants gained a sense of achievement and a belief that they 'can do it'.

*"Em, I liked looking back at the year and saying that I actually achieved something new."*

*"Yeah-just the end of the whole thing it just kind of all came together then and it was like one huge achievement [short pause] like after really accomplishing something massive."*

*"Doing the walking alone massive 'cause it'd nearly kill me to walk to the shop (laughs).It just shows you what you can do , if you want to. like even there going on the trip and stuff, all the walks and everything-like I'd never ever do that -in my whole life - Like never I-could I have imagined that I would do it."*

*"The independence is brilliant there is no feeling like it, knowing that you can pull something off."*

## Other Bronze Main Themes

The responses from the Bronze participants highlighted a number of other main themes. Some participants spoke of the opportunity to mentor younger people and impart knowledge through coaching and teaching. Others spoke of their personal growth. Some reported that they had personally changed as a result of their experience. They felt they had matured and also learnt more about themselves. A smaller number of the participants indicated that their fitness levels had increased as a result of participation. Some of the them noted improvements in their existing skills and some indicated that they had acquired new skills. In addition, the participants highlighted a sense of accomplishment by mastering the ability to set and complete certain goals.

## Gold qualitative results

Similar to the Bronze study, these results were obtained through focus groups and individual interviews. The same structured sequences of questions were asked to of the Gold participants as of the Bronze. Again, the majority of the questions were general and open-ended to allow participants full opportunity to discuss their experience of their participation in the Award. Eleven participants took part in the interviews. Participants came from eight counties. There were seven females and four males.

Thematic Analysis was utilised to analyse the data from both the Bronze and Gold focus groups and interviews. An inter-rater reliability test was undertaken to determine the confidence in the themes. Five of the eleven Gold interview transcripts (45%) were randomly selected for this purpose. The kappa coefficient for inter-rater reliability was .8 for the qualitative analyses, indicating good reliability.

Sixty-six sub-themes emerged from the interviews

Table 6.2: Main Themes from Gold participants' Interviews

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Frequency	Total
Positive relationships	Friendships	14	56
	Team membership	13	
	Opportunity to meet people	9	
	Talk to people	6	
	Mix with people	5	
	Communicate	4	
	Know people	3	
	Camaraderie	2	
Mental Fortitude	Challenge	9	37
	Motivation	9	
	Commitment	8	
	Push oneself	4	
	Out of comfort zone	3	
	Determination	2	
	Perseverance	2	
Empathy-Altruism	Opportunity to help	16	31
	Greater patience	9	
	Volunteering	3	
	Empathy	3	
Positive Emotions	Happy, happiness	10	28
	Fun	7	
	Craic	7	
	Enjoyment	4	
Self-Efficacy	Achievement	14	21
	Can do it	7	
Goals	Goal opportunities	19	19
Skills	Enhanced skill(s)	18	18
Personal Growth	Self-growth	4	12
	Greater maturity	3	
	Opportunity to learn	3	
	Change	2	
Positive Thoughts	Enhanced confidence	10	10
Fitness	Improved fitness	10	10
Mentoring	Opportunity to teach	7	7

with the Gold participants. A thematic analysis of the responses produced a total of fourteen main themes (see Table 6.2). The most common theme which emerged from the Gold interviews was the theme of Positive Relationships. The second most frequent theme highlighted the Mental Fortitude developed by the Gold participants as a consequence of participating in the President's Award. Compassion for others and the Positive Emotions presented as the third and fourth most common theme respectively.

## Gold Main Theme 1: Positive Relationships

The main theme which emerged from the interviews with the Gold participants was the positive relationships the interviewees developed as a result of their participation in the Award programme. In describing their positive relationships, the Gold participants spoke about friends, teams, camaraderie and communication. In addition, the participants emphasised the opportunity the programme provided for some of the respondents to meet, mix with, talk to, and get to know people.

*"We were - we were all friends anyway, beforehand, but we got to know each other even more. And I think now, doing the 'Gold' one, going on again. And we all said we'd do the journey together."*

*"Yeah, teamwork, and - em [short pause] I think working with other people - yeah the team definitely, because y - I've worked with people from all different ages, and all different abilities. So - em - teamwork is definitely important. Em - [tuts] and I suppose [pause] yeah, the - the trust and the - the teamwork, and maybe just being honest with yourself, I think."*

*"But when you actually have to be yourself, and - em [short pause] meet somebody new and hope that somebody new might like (laughing) you, and that you might get on with them, em - that - that was*

*difficult. But it's nice when you kind of think, 'Well no I've done it before so I can do it again.'"*

*"Even having to talk to new people and go places on your own and I - I think that's been really helpful to me. I would have been really, really quiet, and not wanting to talk to anyone if I didn't have to."*

*"It was brilliant now, it was really, really good and you can [short pause] you learn to communicate - I think - better with people like, on - on different levels as well."*

## Gold Main Theme 2: Mental Fortitude

The results from the interviews with the Gold participants indicated that a number of the participants developed a degree of mental fortitude as a consequence of participation in the Gaisce programme. It became apparent that the interviewees realised that they could now face certain challenges in life. A number of those interviewed highlighted the motivation and commitment required to complete challenges while others acknowledged their capacity to push and place themselves out of their 'comfort zone'. In addition, the participants emphasised their new determination and capacity to persevere.

*"I just think the challenge and the fact that if you set your mind to something you can do it, if you make yourself do it, really."*

*"This is my second year doing archery. I only started it this time two years ago [short pause] em - during - at the summer. And, em - I haven't done many competitions, so that's why I wanted to continue it and include in my 'Gaisce' so it would motivate me even further."*

*"You definitely have to push yourself and just [short pause] you know, keep going and, even though I just said, you know, you have to know when to quit sort of thing, but there's a difference I think - being able to -*

*to know what you're capable of doing and not making excuses for it."*

*"I believe in myself - as corny as that sounds! (laughs) Sort of being able - like the - the - the harder the challenges, the more determined I am to fill - to finish them and to complete them, you know."*

### **Gold Main Theme 3: Empathy-Altruism**

Participation in the President's Award appears to have enabled the Gold participants to become more compassionate towards others. Many of the interviewees reported that they are more likely to help, and are more patient with others as a consequence of their Gaisce experience. Some of the participants also highlighted a sense of empathy and are now more willing to volunteer to assist other people.

*"I now know how to do it in a way that I'm not just shouting at sm - all the time. You know I - I - I can now get my point across [short pause] without shouting. I think it's patience really. Patience and then listening to them."*

*"I did know how to - how to deal with it and what they were feeling, so I think - em - empathy was another thing as well so. As well as showing the maturity, you also had to show them that you understood."*

### **Gold Main Theme 4: Positive Emotions**

Participation in the Award programme appears to have generated positive emotions for a number of the Gold interviewees. The participants described many aspects of the programme as fun and reported that they felt happy participating. A number of those interviewed spoke about the enjoyment and 'craic' associated with taking part in Gaisce.

*"I suppose [short pause] you (laughs) starting off, you'd hope to be able to finish it. But em - the happiness comes when you do finish it. But em - yeah, no I do definitely think that there's - there's hope in it, and you give each other hope as well, especially when you do it with a group."*

*"I did the last ten kilometres of my walk in this thing called 'The Turf Challenge'. So we were like [short pause] running through rivers and [short pause] u - pools, and bogs, and [short pause] it was just - it was really [short pause] fun."*

*"You see it because I enjoy all the things I'm doing with 'Gaisce', it kind of - it's encouraging me not to stress so much. I mean I have repeats this year [short pause] because of illness - but it's kind of encouraged me that you can take time out from study or from work or [short pause] and do something that [short pause] okay, you're not 'gonna' - you're probably not 'gonna' get paid for it, but you can still feel like an internal reward."*

### **Gold Main Theme 5: Self-efficacy**

One of main themes which emerged from the interviews with the Gold Participants was the sense of accomplishment that they attained from participating in Gaisce programme. The interviews reference both a sense of achievement and the belief that one 'can do it'

*"I think I'm on a [short pause] for myself, I [short pause] I'm on a passage - I have various, different goals and things I want to achieve and [short pause] and reaching a stage at - reaching a point of complete happiness in life is what we're all after. I think I'm getting there slowly, and I think - definitely I think - 'Gaisce' has been a part of that too."*

*"I just think the challenge and the fact that if you set your mind to something, you can do it, if you make yourself do it, really."*

## Gold Main Theme 6: Goals

The importance of goal setting was emphasised by a proportion of the Gold Participants. It appears that participation in Gaisce has encouraged a number of the participants to set long term goals and allowed them to develop strategies to completing the same goals.

*"And also had to break down a long-term goal - because a long-term goal is very vague. [Short Pause] Like being top three in women's - I mean, how do I get there? Like, do I just train? No, I do boxing. I do my core work. I do - like actually you can see, I'm kind of moving kind of stiff 'cause I've been boxing. I work mm - mm - the strength in my shoulders. I visit a 'physio'. I work on my core a huge amount. [Short Pause] It's kind of breaking down the goal and realising that [short pause] you need to kind of [short pause] plan your goal, in that [short pause] you can't just go and [short pause] become brilliant at something."*

*"Maybe, because [short pause] I feel, I feel [short pause] you do get stronger when you set yourself goals and you - and you achieve them. [Short Pause] I do think it gives you - it encourages you to set more goals and achieve them. Yes, yeah. Rather than, prior to this, I might have set a goal and not worked so hard to achieve it."*

## Gold Main Theme 7: Skills

Participation in Gaisce appears to have enabled a number of the interviewees to develop certain skills. While some indicated that they developed completely new skills, others advanced previous skills to much higher levels.

*"I gained - eh - tennis skills 'cause I haven't played a proper sport before you know - I think I'd go back though, to be honest. I'd think I'd love to go back and maybe [short pause] actually teach other kids then."*

*"There would be some nice practical skills I've learned - eh - through the Reserve Defence Forces - I've [short pause] done courses, and I've just recently, through the Reserve Defence Forces, I passed my full driving test - through them [short pause] and I qualified on 'Off-road Driving', 'Advanced Driving' and 'Driving with a Trailer' - so I was delighted with that - to have that skill [short pause] em - and to be recognised and qualified for it which was - which was brilliant - which is - which is a really big skill, you know, to have."*

## Other Main Themes from the Gold Qualitative Study

A number of other main themes emerged from the responses from the Gold participants. The theme of personal growth emerged, with participants indicating that they were aware of self growth and an increased maturity. In addition, some of the Gold participants reported that they had learned new things and had changed as a consequence of their participation in the programme. A feeling of greater confidence also emerged as a theme. The participants emphasised a feeling of greater inner confidence or self-esteem. In addition, they also reported improved confidence both with regard to talking to others and attempting new things. Some of the Gold participants underlined the physical benefits that they obtained from participating in Gaisce. They believed that their levels of fitness as a result of their physical component of the award improved. Finally, some Gold Participants discussed the opportunity they were given to coach or teach young people en route to gaining the Award.

## Summary of Main Themes from Qualitative Research

Overall, the results from both the Bronze and Gold qualitative interviews showed remarkable consistency with regard to main themes and their frequency of

reference by the participants, with the same eleven main themes occurring with the most frequency in both groups (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Main Themes in order of Frequency for Bronze and Gold Participants

Bronze - Frequency of Occurrence		Gold - Frequency of Occurrence	
Main Theme	Theme Total	Main Theme	Theme Total
Positive relationships	69	Positive relationships	56
Empathy-Altruism	50	Mental Fortitude	37
Positive Thoughts	49	Empathy-Altruism	31
Positive Emotions	45	Positive Emotions	28
Mental Fortitude	41	Self-efficacy	21
Self-efficacy	41	Goals	19
Mentoring	15	Skills	18
Personal Growth	14	Personal Growth	12
Fitness	10	Positive Thoughts	10
Skills	9	Fitness	10
Goals	7	Mentoring	7

When the Bronze and Gold theme frequencies were combined, positive relationships emerged as the most frequently cited theme, followed by empathy-altruism, mental fortitude, positive emotions, self-efficacy and positive thoughts. Completing the eleven main themes were personal growth, goals, skills, mentoring and fitness (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Combined Bronze and Gold Frequency of Occurrence of Main Themes

Combined Bronze and Gold Frequency of Occurrence of Main Themes	
Main Theme	Theme Frequency Total
Positive relationships	125
Empathy-Altruism	81
Mental Fortitude	78
Positive Emotions	73
Self-efficacy	62
Positive Thoughts	41
Personal Growth	15
Goals	14
Skills	10
Mentoring	9
Fitness	7

# Chapter Seven: Key Findings and Research Implications

## Introduction

The current research examines if the positive attributes of hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being, which have been identified as outcome goals in many youth development programmes, are enhanced by participation in Gaisce-The President's Award, and whether, therefore, the Gaisce programme meets the inclusion criteria to be called a Positive Youth Development programme.

## Key Findings

Quantitative evidence was found to support the hypothesis that participation in Gaisce-The President's Award programme does act as a catalyst in the enhancement of the positive psychological attributes of hope pathways thinking and self-efficacy in both Gaisce Bronze and Gold participants.

Further evidence confirmed that there was significant improvement in the positive psychological attributes of hope pathways thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being for the Bronze Gaisce participants who scored in the lowest quartile pre-participation.

The qualitative findings cross-validated the quantitative findings, and provided corroborative evidence for the overall results.

There was also sufficient evidence to confirm that Gaisce-The President's Award programme meets the criteria for inclusion as a Positive Youth Development Programme.

## Hope - Results

Results from the quantitative component of the research indicate that there was a significant

improvement in both Bronze and Gold participants' scores on the Hope Pathways Subscale post-participation, indicating that they now have the ability to plan and execute routes to achieving their goals. Bronze participants who scored within the lowest quartile on the Pathways Subscale at Time 1 (pre-participation) experienced a moderate positive effect at Time 2 (post-participation) when compared with their control counterparts. The findings of the qualitative component found increases in hopeful thinking in both Gaisce groups.

Many of the Gaisce Bronze and Gold participants spoke of their enhanced positive outlook as a result of participation. Some participants attributed this positive attitude to having set and achieved personal goals. It further emerged from the Bronze participants interviewed that they were now more confident in their ability to overcome difficulties and were able to generate workable routes towards achieving their goals.

Both Bronze and Gold participants interviewed reported that participation in Gaisce-The President's Award programme had fostered in them the belief that there are always alternative solutions or paths to their difficulties and problems. Gold participants noted that they were more competent at breaking down large complex situations and tasks into more manageable components, and as a result of their improved ability to problem-solve, they believed that they had become more hopeful and confident.

The adventure component of the Award required, according to the Gaisce participants interviewed, perseverance and determination to complete. The participants described what they called their 'self-talk' and what is known as a positive mind-set. Bronze participants recalled saying to themselves, 'I can do this and I am not going to give up,' and how this 'self-talk' enabled them to continue and complete the challenge. The Gold participants spoke of having to

call on their hopeful thinking in order to complete the Award.

A number of Bronze participants noted that the other Bronze participants gave them hope through encouragement and support, which helped them to complete the Award, and in the process, to make new friends and strengthen existing friendships.

Gaisce requires all participants to set themselves challenging and demanding goals in four areas. The Gaisce Bronze and Gold participants interviewed spoke of having encountered obstacles that required them to review and re-evaluate their original plans to reach their various goals. Having successfully managed to overcome these challenges, they now had enhanced hope and belief that they could draw upon these experiences in the future, when facing new challenges. A number of Bronze participants who took part in the focus groups spoke of their enhanced hopeful thinking as a result of having overcome personal challenges, such as working in a shop, public speaking or working in a nursing home.

## Hope - Implications

Given the wide evidence that some young Irish people manifest high levels of despair and hopelessness, it is very important to find methods to strengthen young peoples' levels of hope. Participation in Positive Youth Development programmes can provide vital access to positive opportunities and supportive relationships. While Gaisce is not a panacea for all youth problems, the current research results demonstrate that participation in the programme provides opportunities for young people to develop their ability to find ways through personal challenges.

According to Rutter (1994), building hope is akin to a psychological immunisation process which protects the individual by enhancing their resilience levels. When the positive psychological attributes of hope

and self-efficacy are combined, what results is a resilient young person who not only believes that he or she is capable of generating pathways to bring about change, but who believes he or she can make change happen. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research confirm that Gaisce-The President's Award programme is significantly increasing young people's hope pathways thinking.

## Self-Efficacy - Results

Both Bronze and Gold participants experienced significant increases in their levels of self-efficacy as a result of taking part in the Gaisce programme. The post-participation scores indicated higher scores for both Bronze and Gold participants over their control groups. While participation in Gaisce had a moderate effect on self-efficacy levels for the overall Bronze and Gold groupings, a large effect was evident for the Bronze participants who scored within the lowest quartile pre-participation. The findings of the qualitative component found increases in self-efficacy levels for Bronze and Gold participants.

## Self-Efficacy - Implications

The belief that one has the inner strength to achieve one's desired aims is termed one's self-efficacy, which has been identified as a key attribute of positive psychology, a protective factor and an important component of well-being. Many theorists suggest that self-efficacy affects every domain of human endeavour.

Self-efficacy is of immense importance to the personal growth of young people (UNICEF, 2011b and 2011c). During the adolescent and early adult years, young people are faced with difficult and complex challenges. Given the serious problems in Ireland around such difficult issues as drinking, smoking, drug-taking, sexual practices and

relationships, a programme that can help adolescents to develop greater levels of self-efficacy is of importance (Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona and Schwarzer, 2005). The Gaisce programme affords young people opportunities for decision-making in structured and supportive environments. This learning experience helps them to develop their levels of self-efficacy and what Benson et al. (1997) termed their social competency, both internal assets which are important and invaluable attributes for life.

One of the main themes to emerge from interviews with both Bronze and Gold participants was what can be termed mental fortitude. The Bronze participants spoke of their 'enhanced capacity to challenge themselves', and their ability to 'motivate themselves' and 'push themselves'. They referred to their increased sense of self-belief and self-worth. Gold participants spoke of their increased ability to achieve and of having a 'can-do' attitude towards life and its challenges. Taking part in the Gaisce programme had fostered in them a belief that they could achieve and that, having been successful in the Gaisce programme, they could go on to be successful again. Both groups took pride in knowing that they had pushed themselves, had stayed motivated and calm in the face of adversity, and had emerged triumphant from the challenges.

Theorists see goals as fuelled by self-efficacy and as spurs to ignite action in an individual, and this was borne out by the current research. The Gold participants in the Gaisce programme indicated that participation had motivated and spurred them to set long- and short-term goals in order to achieve the Award. The Bronze participants spoke about their sense of achievement after mastering a skill in their journey towards obtaining the Award, using terms like 'defining moment', 'great feeling' and 'immense happiness'. Bronze and Gold Gaisce participants interviewed appreciated that they were allowed to select and set their own personal goals in each of the four components of the Award. They were thereby providing themselves with their own self-concordant

goals, and thus increasing their levels of personal motivation and self-efficacy.

Many of the Gaisce participants interviewed spoke of their sense of achievement, with Gold participants highlighting the satisfaction they had attained through their experience of the programme. Gold participants also recognised that because they had successfully achieved their goals in the Award, they were more likely to be successful again in other circumstances.

Self-efficacy has the potential to be influenced by people and programmes (Snyder and Lopez, 2006). Positive Youth Development programmes aim to help young people to enhance and develop their levels of self-efficacy by allowing them to assert their independence in a safe and supportive environment. A number of the Bronze and Gold Gaisce participants interviewed highlighted the fact that taking part in the Gaisce Award programme had allowed them to become more independent and self-confident.

Ultimately, the research findings support the hypothesis that the Gaisce Award programme facilitates the development of self-efficacy in its Bronze and Gold participants.

## **Self-Esteem - Results**

The quantitative results found that participation in Gaisce had a significant effect on the self-esteem levels of the Bronze Award participants who had scored in the lowest quartile of the group at pre-test when compared with their control counterparts. While the lowest quartile for both the Gaisce and control groups experienced increases, the Gaisce group experienced the greater increase from Time 1 (pre-participation) to Time 2. The qualitative findings ascertained from the interviews confirmed enhanced levels of self-esteem for both Bronze and Gold interviewees.

## Self-Esteem - Implications

Self-esteem is literally the worth people place on themselves. It is the evaluative component of self-knowledge. The concept of self-esteem has received much attention over the past few decades, and is deemed by many to be the central psychological source from which many positive behaviours and outcomes originate, including happiness, well-being, energy, social skills and mental health (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2008; and Pavot and Diener, 2008).

Baumister et al., (2003) found that self-esteem has been associated with an individual's ability to persist in the face of failure, their willingness to devise their own plans and select their own approaches to completing tasks and goals, and their adaptiveness. The theme of persistence and determination was raised by Gold Gaisce participants during their interviews. They noticed in particular that, as a result of their experiences during the Gaisce programme, they were more enthusiastic about setting challenges for themselves and more able to persist in the face of adversity. They also reported increased motivation and increased self-belief. Bronze participants noted that they were more able to work on their own initiative, and understood that facing challenges was part of the maturing process.

Four key internal assets that comprise "positive identity" according to Benson (1997)—personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose and positive view of the future—were cited by both Bronze and Gold interviewees as personal outcomes from their participation in Gaisce—The President's Award. A number of the Gold participants interviewed spoke of their enhanced self-esteem in terms of their increased capability to bring about personal change. They cited themselves as being 'pro-active' and believed that they were responsible for bringing about change in their own lives. Bronze participants reported how they had learned to be reflective as a result of participating in the programme. The programme had, they said, enabled them to come to know themselves more

fully and honestly, which in turn had led to increased levels of self-esteem.

Many participants interviewed linked personal achievement to enhanced self-esteem. Gold participants noted that their self-esteem had increased as a result of their commitment to, and their success in, achieving their personal goals and challenges. Bronze participants reported that the Award had added to their sense of self-worth and confidence, which again in turn had increased their levels of self-esteem. Both Gold and Bronze interviewees spoke of how they were now more determined and more able to take a new course of action if their current strategy wasn't working.

Similar to other core attributes, self-esteem requires supportive relationships and a supportive environment in which to grow and develop (Durlak et al., 2010). A Gold participant interviewed reported that their President's Award Leader (PAL) had become a person to whom she turned for advice. Another Gold participant said her PAL had been a source of encouragement to her, and had inspired her to believe in herself and her ability. A number of the Bronze participants gave credit to their Transition Year Co-ordinators/teachers and coaches for nurturing their self-esteem and in doing so, helping them to achieve their Award. A number of both Bronze and Gold participants believed that the feedback they had received from parents, teachers, peers and other supportive adults in recognition of their achievements had enhanced their self-belief and self-esteem. The quantitative results also indicate that Bronze participants who had scored in the lowest quartile pre-participation reported significantly increased levels of self-esteem, suggesting that young people with low levels of self-esteem benefit significantly from participation in the Gaisce programme.

The findings from the qualitative component of this research support the premise that participation in Gaisce—The President's Award enhances levels of self-

esteem by imbuing participants with a sense of power and purpose, determination and persistence.

## Happiness - Results

The quantitative results found that Gaisce had a moderate effect on those Gaisce Bronze participants who scored within the lowest quartile at Time 1. These experienced significantly improved levels of happiness over time, and also when compared with their control group counterparts at Time 2. While participants in both Bronze and Gold programmes demonstrated high levels of happiness at pre-participation testing, results from the qualitative component confirmed that participation in the programme had contributed to their levels of happiness.

## Happiness - Implications

According to many studies, one of the most powerful predictive factors of young people's well-being is peer relationships (La Fontana and Ollessen, 2009; Boyd and Bee, 2005; and Griffin, 2002). This is supported by the qualitative findings of this study, in which an overwhelming proportion of both Bronze and Gold participants viewed positive peer relationship as the single most valuable aspect of their participation in the Gaisce programme.

Research indicates that a major source of happiness for young people is their relationship with others, particularly parents, friends and supportive adults (Diener and Seligman, 2002; Chaplin, 2009; and Holder and Coleman, 2009). The Gaisce programme afforded participants to become part of a team, to meet people, to make new friends and to enhance existing friendships. Both groups interviewed described how taking part in Gaisce had encouraged and facilitated their interaction with others. Both groups stated that taking part in Gaisce had provided them with opportunities to meet new people and to

enhance existing relationships. Both groups spoke of getting opportunities to spend time with friends, and how happy that made them. Gold participants interviewed noted that a major benefit for them of the Gaisce experience was the opportunity to make new friends with similar outlooks, with whom they believed they would remain friends into the future. Bronze participants described getting to know friends better, of getting to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Both groups confirmed that through working together to complete Gaisce tasks, they now had stronger friendships. Both groups also talked about the importance of the opportunity to be a member of a team as they worked toward completing their challenges, and how they found this form of group affiliation rewarding and supportive.

Bronze participants spoke of how they felt supported by peers. They stated that there was much less segregation or clique formation among participants than they had experienced prior to joining the Gaisce programme. Bronze participants from Northern Ireland noted with enthusiasm that, for once, religious affiliation was not an issue for them. Participants generally confirmed that camaraderie and friendship were among the highlights of the programme.

Interviews with both Bronze and Gold participants highlighted their increased happiness as a result of taking part in the programme. The Bronze participants spoke of the pleasure, fun and enjoyment they experienced from participation. They described the great fun and 'craic' they had while participating, particularly in the community involvement and the adventure trips.

A number of the Gold participants reported experiencing a deeper level of happiness from contributing to a worthwhile activity. They spoke of their happiness when volunteering, and of the deep satisfaction they felt when assisting others. A number of Bronze participants indicated increased levels of eudaemonic happiness (a contented state of being happy and healthy and prosperous), achieved from

using their skills, or from mentoring teams of younger children. Both groups of participants described how engaging in meaningful activities brought them immense satisfaction in their lives and improved their own mood and well-being. The participants spoke of their absorption in completing tasks and while working with others.

It has been found that people who choose their own positive activities are more likely to adhere to those activities and to show greater increases in well-being (Sheldon, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2007). The current research found that the least happy Bronze participants pre-participation (the bottom 25% of the overall Bronze group) achieved significantly higher levels of happiness post-participation, confirming that engaging in meaningful positive activities can assist an individual to directly raise their own level of happiness and well-being.

This research confirms the evidence from the empirical literature that positive relationships and positive activities are the key to happiness. The Gaisce participants indicated that taking part in the programme afforded them opportunities to engage in positive relationship and positive activities, which they cited as contributing to their overall levels of happiness.

## Psychological Well-Being - Results

Participation in Gaisce had a moderate effect on the levels of psychological well-being of the Bronze participants who scored within the lowest quartile on the Ryff scale (1989) at Time 1. The quantitative results found significant improvements over time in levels of psychological well-being for these participants, and when compared against their control counterparts at Time 2.

## Psychological Well-Being - Implications

Self-acceptance is a positive attitude towards the self. Bronze participants interviewed discussed how they had come to know and appreciate themselves better. Some Gold participants believed that they had "grown as a person" and were able to accept themselves for who they were.

Personal growth is defined as having feelings of continued development and potential, being open to new experiences, and feeling increasingly knowledgeable and effective. As already noted, both Bronze and Gold participants stated that they had grown as a result of participation in the programme. Personal growth emerged as a theme for the Gold participants interviewed, who stated that they had grown through the opportunities afforded by the programme requirements to learn new skills and encounter new experiences. Bronze participants reported that they had grown through completing tasks that they would not have previously attempted. All participants interviewed believed that the Gaisce programme had provided them with increased opportunities to experience new things.

Having a purpose in life was evident in the interviews with the Gold participants. They reported on the opportunities afforded them by the programme to set long-term goals and the satisfaction they gained from reaching them, and while Bronze participants also highlighted setting and meeting goals, they focussed on more immediate aims.

Environmental mastery can be summarised as feeling competent and able to manage complex environments. The Gaisce programme requires all participants to set and achieve demanding challenges in acquiring new skills, engaging in community involvement, becoming more physically fit, and planning and taking part in an adventure journey. A number of participants described how the award had made them venture into environments that they would not have done previously. A Gold

participant described taking up tennis, having never played any sport previously, and a Bronze participant set himself the goal of running a marathon. In the area of community service, another Gold participant worked late in the evening feeding homeless men in an inner city setting.

Autonomy is about being able to think and act independently. A number of the participants interviewed stated that they had matured and had grown while participating in the Award, and had become more independent as a result. Bronze participants viewed themselves as becoming more independent and more able to think independently, as demonstrated by their enhanced confidence and greater self-belief. Gold participants identified enhanced mental fortitude in terms of motivation, commitment, determination and perseverance, as an indicator of their ability to act more independently.

Altruism, or empathic concern for others, is a particularly important attribute for enhanced positive relationships (Eisenberg, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Hoffman, 2000; and Singer, 2006). The idea of concern for others and altruism emerged as a significant theme from the interviews with the Bronze and Gold participants. Both groups spoke about how participating in the programme had developed their levels of empathy and compassion, directly contributing to greater satisfaction and contentment with their lives. It emerged from the interviews that the Gaisce participants liked and enjoyed helping others. The component of the Award that evoked the most altruistic behaviours was the community service component, which both Bronze and Gold participants interviewed ranked as the most helpful component for their personal growth.

Gaisce participants interviewed spoke of feeling better about themselves emotionally, and liking themselves more, as a result of assisting or helping others. Gold participants reported that participation in the President's Award enabled them to become more compassionate towards others. A number of

Bronze participants stated that they had become more patient and more forgiving of others as a result of volunteering. Bronze participants were more surprised by their newly acquired virtue of altruism than the Gold participants, stating that they had been rarely asked to help others before taking part in the Award.

The findings of this research support the premise that participation in Gaisce-The President's Award enhances psychological well-being in participants by providing them with the opportunity to experience and develop the three essential components of positive psychology, a positive programme or institution, positive relationships and positive attributes.

## **Positive Youth development programmes**

Positive Youth Development programmes are services and supports organised for young people, aimed at assisting them to acquire skills and competencies and to enhance their personal strengths and attributes. These programmes adopt a universal strengths-based approach (Durlak, 2008) with the aim of empowering young people to reach their potential by providing a supportive forum for positive relationships and positive opportunities to develop skills and acquire independence. Albee (1996), Cowen (1994), Durak (1997) and Elias (1995) found that Positive Youth Development programmes help to build protective factors in participants that have the potential to act as buffers against psychological distress.

Gaisce-The President's Award was designed to contribute to the development of all young Irish people through building their skills, attributes and strengths for the betterment of themselves and their communities. From the beginning, the Gaisce programme has been based on Kurt Hahn's innovative philosophy that "each of us has more

courage, more strength and more compassion than we realise." As discussed, building personal strengths in young people is central to all the inclusion criteria for a programme to be classified as a Positive Youth Development programme. It is apparent from the findings of this research that Gaisce–The President's Award programme, through its structure, operation and outcome goals, successfully meets the inclusion criteria to be classified as a Positive Youth Development programme.

## Implications for Policy and Research

The Positive Youth Development perspective does not attempt to ignore the many problems and difficulties facing young people. Rather, it attempts to identify and develop the positive strengths and attributes of young people which, with support and recognition, can become personal assets and protective factors for the young person in difficult times.

A Positive Youth Development approach offers a genuine basis for assisting young people to take control of their own lives in a meaningful and proactive way. As Gaisce–The President's Award programme has been shown to be a successful Positive Youth Development programme, consideration should be given to ensuring that all young people be afforded the opportunity to participate in this programme.

This research has confirmed that levels of self-efficacy and hope pathways were significantly improved for all Bronze and Gold Award participants as a result of participation in the programme. Given the prevalence in Ireland of psychological problems in its young people (Malone et al., 2012; Carr, 2006; Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick and McGorry, 2007), a programme like Gaisce that can significantly improve the psychological attributes of its participants has positive implications for the psychological health of the nation's young people,

particularly those most in need of opportunity and inspiration. These implications should be considered by both national policy-makers and those working with adolescents and young people.

The findings have also shown that scores in levels of self-efficacy, hope pathways, happiness, self-esteem and psychological well-being had significantly improved over time for the Bronze Award participants who had scored in the lowest quartile of the group in pre-testing against their control counterparts. This suggests that those with greater psychological needs benefitted most from participation in the Gaisce programme, which has important clinical implications.

More widespread participation in the Award programme should have positive implications for the psychological health of young Irish people and in turn have a positive effect on mental health services waiting lists. However, it is of paramount importance that such expansion should proceed with caution and careful planning, so as to ensure the quality of the programme is not compromised in any way (O'Connor, Small and Cooney, 2007). Adapting such programmes (e.g., reducing the length of components, lowering the level of participants' engagement, or changing the theoretical approach) carries risk implications for their efficacy. Lee (2009) noted that the quality of programme implementation (process) has a high correlation with outcome goals. Close adherence to the programme's guiding principles, therefore, is necessary and important.

The qualitative and quantitative data verified that all the Bronze and Gold participants in the Gaisce research acquired, to greater or lesser degrees, enhanced positive strengths. According to Carr (2006), such psychological attributes serve as protective factors against anxiety and depression. Accordingly, it may be hypothesised that the life trajectory of these young people will be more positive as a result of their participation in the Award programme.

## Implications for Further Research

This was the first piece of scientific research ever conducted to explore how participation in Gaisce–The President’s Award programme affects positive psychological attributes in its participants. Further research could examine other aspects of the Award, such as the effects of participation specifically on participants’ relationships or other outcome goals, such as levels of empathy/altruism. Further research could track participants’ progress a year (or more) after completing the Award to ascertain if the gains made were sustained.

As Gaisce–The President’s Award is a national award programme with many thousands of participants annually, the programme has the potential to be a unique forum for gathering future data on the psychological attributes of Ireland’s young people. This has been successfully done in the United States by Lerner et al. (2011) and the 4H national programme. The Duke of Edinburgh Award programme is also committed to similar research. However a caveat must be entered here. The quality of the research must be of the highest standard, completed under expert supervision and in adherence with best practice guidelines. Furthermore, if Gaisce were to follow the U.S. example and add a research component to their Award admissions process, it would be essential that this was done under the direction and supervision of psychology professionals to monitor the ethical and sensitive nature of the data received and to interpret the findings accurately and appropriately.

According to Kessler et al. (2005), the U.S. National Co-morbidity Survey (2003) indicated that 75% of all mental health disorders had commenced before the age of 24 years. To put it another way, three-quarters of all mental health disorders emerge during the adolescent and early adult period. UNICEF (2011) also highlighted that the occurrence of mental health disorders and depressive diagnoses in adolescents has increased over the past 20 to 30 years. Findings

also confirm that many of the mental health difficulties that begin in adolescence do not stop in adolescence. These findings have been borne out in psychological research in an Irish context.

It is of paramount importance that further research programmes that promote the physical and mental health and well-being of adolescents and young adults are undertaken, given the World Health Organisation research finding (p3) in 2003 that “Mental health is a most important, maybe the most important, public health issue, which ... society must [seek] to promote, to protect and to invest in.”

## In Conclusion

The unique developmental period of adolescence and young adulthood is characterised by both vulnerability and potential. The evidence that has emerged from this research demonstrates that the support and opportunities afforded to young people during this period by Gaisce–The President’s Award programme helps to build their psychological attributes and positive personal strengths. This study also confirms that Gaisce–The President’s Award programme meets the criteria necessary to be termed a Positive Youth Development programme.

Gaisce–The President’s Award acts as a catalyst in the enhancement of psychological attributes in its participants. The development of these psychological attributes and personal strengths is encouraging Ireland’s young people to achieve their potential, to be active, connected and contributing members of Irish society, thus enabling them to thrive, now and in the future.

As a programme that embraces the core tenets of positive psychology, those of promoting and nurturing what is best in individuals, Gaisce–The President’s Award remains true to the precepts of Kurt Hahn, on which its philosophy is founded.

*“There is more in you than you think.”*

*– Kurt Hahn (1886-1974)*



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