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## Long-Term Life-Skill Transfer from Sport-Based Positive Youth Development Programs

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### Abstract

Sport-based positive youth development programs focus on life skill development and transfer. However, few long-term follow-up studies examine life skill transfer and application of skills from the perspective of sport-based positive youth development participants who are now young adults. To explore long-term skill development, transfer, and factors influencing long-term skill application, researchers conducted interviews with 13 young adults who participated in an SBPYD program 4 or more years ago. All participants self-identified as Black/African American and cisgender. A majority of participants were male, with ages ranging from 19 to 25 ( $M = 21$ ). Thematic qualitative analysis revealed four contexts in which participants transferred life skills learned, including individually in relation to their health and well-being, interpersonally in relationships, in social settings such as work and at school, and during their involvement in social justice or civic activities in their communities. Five primary facilitators of life skill transfer were described by young adults, including socialization with other youth, staff support, reinforcements of skills during program activities, participation in other positive youth development programs, and family support. Findings demonstrate the value of sport-based positive youth development many years post-participation and shed light on factors that contribute to youths' developmental assets that persist beyond their engagement in sport.

## Introduction

Positive youth development (PYD) is an area of research and practice with two general and complementary goals for youth: promote healthy behaviors and protective factors and reduce problem behaviors and risk factors (Catalano et al., 2004). PYD programs aim to develop life skills among youth and encourage them to transfer life skills to other settings (e.g., school or home). Sport-based PYD (SBPYD) programs leverage sport as a context for life-skill development, promotion of healthy behaviors, and community engagement during out-of-school time, simultaneously mitigating structural and interpersonal risks (e.g., unemployment, lack of childcare, lack of safe places to play, or obesity).

Youth who participate in SBPYD programs are able to successfully transfer life skills learned during sport to other contexts, including school, home, and church (Newman, 2020; Newman & Anderson-Butcher, 2021; Pierce et al., 2022). However, the majority of existing studies focusing on life-skill development and transfer largely focus on skill development and application during or shortly after youth participation in SBPYD programs, that is, a few months to two years postparticipation. For example, Bean et al. (2016) interviewed female youth in one SBPYD program two years or less after they begun participating in the program. The authors found that youth developed skills such as respect and responsibility and later transferred them to other life domains within those two years. Pierce et al. (2022) collected pre- and postsurveys from youth after one year of participating in a SBPYD program, finding that youth successfully transferred self-control from the program to school by maintaining calmness to focus on school and avoid potential fights with peers. Others have explored life skill transfer from the SBPYD program to other life domains within ten months (Newman, 2020). Jacobs and Wright (2021) recently conducted a focus group and two interviews with eleven adolescent youth from another SBPYD program after three years of participation in the program, finding that reflecting on meaning, oneself, and the situation are important for life-skill transfer. Although Jacob and Wright's (2021) study was conducted three years into the program, results were still limited to life-skill transfer among youth and did not provide evidence of life-skill transfer from a SBPYD to other life domains as adults. As such, there remains a need to better understand whether SBPYD programs cultivate sustainable skills and developmental assets for youth participants. The purpose of the present study was to examine the long-term effects of participation in one SBPYD program on young adults who had formerly participated in the program as adolescents. More specifically, we sought to examine the contexts in which skills learned in SBPYD programming are applied later in life and determine what facilitates their application during and after program participation.

### Life Skill Transfer

SBPYD programs aim to encourage life-skills development, which is the process of learning skills, and life-skills transfer, which is the process of applying skills developed from one context effectively within other contexts (Camiré et al., 2012). Several studies demonstrate how skills learned in SBPYD programs can result in transfer to other settings, leading to fewer problem behaviors in other contexts. Youth who participated in Boys & Girls Club programming developed refusal skills and knowledge about substance use. In turn, these skills and knowledge indirectly supported several positive developmental outcomes, including greater academic success and lower engagement in substance misuse and other delinquent behaviors (St. Pierre et al., 1992). Similarly, SBPYD programs designed to maximize youth learning during out-of-school time also allow youth to learn skills that can be transferred to other contexts (Bean et al., 2016; Pierce et al., 2017). Participation in SBPYD programming has been shown to boost self-esteem, belongingness, mental health, and well-being (Eime et al., 2013). Another systematic review of SBPYD programs based in teaching personal and social responsibility found participation in SBPYD programs enhances self-control, self-esteem, leadership skills, grades, and conflict-resolution skills (Pozo et al., 2018). Whitely et al. (2018) also conducted a systematic review of sport for development interventions, finding

SBPYD participation strengthens mental health, well-being, self-esteem, self-control, social cohesion, civic engagement, peace-building skills, and peer relationships. Participation also has led to decreases in problem behaviors among youth and those living in socially vulnerable circumstances (Poza et al., 2018; Whitley et al., 2018). These studies demonstrate the vast social implications and protective factors associated with implementing SBPYD in underserved communities.

Pierce et al.'s (2017) model of sport-based life-skills transfer frames the mechanisms by which youth can develop different life skills in the learning context and apply them to other environments and situations, known as the transfer contexts (Pierce et al., 2017). The model suggests individual learners first develop life skills in a learning context (e.g., a SBPYD program). Then, the transfer of life skills to other contexts is influenced by several facilitators grouped into internal assets (e.g., previous knowledge or motivation), external assets (e.g., influence of parents and other adults), and autobiographical experiences (e.g., lived experiences). In other words, a high level of motivation, support from adults, and opportunities to practice life skills are important factors that promote life-skill transfer from SBPYD programs (Pierce et al., 2017). Noticing similarities between learning and transfer contexts, such as how activities in sport are similar to activities in school, also promotes life-skill transfer. Relatedly, life-skills transfer also involves an ongoing process of interactions, interpretations, and adjustments (Pierce et al., 2017). That is, as SBPYD participants interact with other people and environments, they must continue to interpret the situation as a potential context for transfer and adjust their understanding and use of life skills to successfully apply them in the new and unique situation. Indeed, scholars have argued that providing youth with opportunities to debrief about how life skills may be transferred to other settings facilitates life-skills transfer (Camiré et al., 2009; Pierce et al., 2019). Jacobs and Wright (2021) corroborated these assertions when they found that reflecting on the meaning of life skills and the potential application of life skills in different situations were critical to life-skills transfer. Kendellen and Camiré (2019) similarly concluded that adaptation to new situations facilitated life-skills transfer among university intramural athletes. More recent scholarship has expanded upon the Pierce et al.'s (2017) model to identify and examine a variety of facilitators of life-skills transfer and transfer contexts.

## **Transfer Facilitators and Contexts**

Scholars are continuing to understand facilitators of life-skill transfer, as well as transfer contexts in which youth apply the skills they learn in sport to other settings. For example, individual factors such as personal reflection, personal importance, perceived autonomy, self-confidence, and peer valuation significantly predict the transfer of self-control to school contexts (Pierce et al., 2022). In addition, Bean et al. (2016) argued that practicing skills, drawing upon teachable moments, and debriefing activities promote life-skills transfer. Researchers also contend programs and youth sport leaders need to ensure opportunities to practice life skills are achievable yet challenging, new and unique to the participant, and reinforced by tangible rewards and social support (Newman & Anderson-Butcher, 2021).

Support from peers, confidence in using life skills, positive parental regard, fun opportunities to use life skills, and rewards for successful application also have been shown to facilitate life-skill transfer (Allen et al., 2015). Newman and Anderson-Butcher (2021), though, concluded peers only affect life-skill transfer and not the development of life skills, perhaps because peers often move across different contexts together. Meanwhile, family members influence both the development and transfer of life skills through modeling and discussions outside of sport activities (Newman & Anderson-Butcher, 2021). Indeed, peers and family members can encourage life-skills transfer from SBPYD programs to various transfer contexts throughout one's adolescence.

In fact, research in life-skills transfer has documented several ways youth have transferred life skills from SBPYD programs to various transfer contexts throughout their adolescence. Bean et al. (2016), for example, found youth transfer life skills to interactions with peers at home, in school, and in other sport

contexts. Also, Newman (2020) reported youth participating in an SBPYD program applied self-control, effort, grit, personal responsibility, communication, respect, and social responsibility at home, in school, in church, in video games, and in other sports. In addition, Pierce et al. (2022) examined how youth who learned self-control at a SBPYD camp later used self-control in the hallway, classroom, and in other sports. Bates et al. (2021) even found virtual SBPYD lessons helped youth learn skills such as integrity that they anticipated transferring to school or sport settings. These studies represent evidence that youth participating in SBPYD programs often transfer skills to home, church, school, and other sports.

As research in life-skills transfer continues to evolve, opportunities exist to identify additional transfer contexts that SBPYD participants will encounter and adapt to later in life. There are possibilities that former SBPYD participants adequately adjust their understandings of the meaning and use of life skills they developed during the SBPYD program to apply them in new and unique contexts as adults. This knowledge will help researchers identify ways to further cue and reinforce learning beyond participants' current developmental stage. This level of inquiry would also advance the literature on the model of sport-based life-skills transfer (Pierce et al., 2017) and contribute to the longitudinal research on the influence of SBPYD programs. Indeed, the extant literature is largely focused on life-skills transfer shortly after program participation. Yet, research on life-skills transfer from SBPYD program participation to transfer contexts in young adulthood could help practitioners and researchers gain insight into how to further encourage life skills transfer throughout one's lifespan.

To date, whether and to what extent life skills learned during adolescence are relevant and applied into adulthood remains relatively unknown. Current transfer studies often focus on a narrow postparticipation window, yet a critical goal of PYD research is to create sustainable changes that extend into adulthood (Catalano et al., 2004). That is, a lack of research has explored if and how SBPYD participants continue to apply life skills to new contexts after program completion and transitioning into adulthood. Knowledge of how some former SBPYD campers continue to adapt to new situations to apply life skills they developed when they were campers may provide insight into how to encourage continued use of life skills among current campers. Put differently, such knowledge can be used by SBPYD practitioners when debriefing with youth and encouraging them to reflect on the meaning and future possible uses of various life skills. Thus, to address this gap in the literature, we conducted a qualitative study with former SBPYD participants to examine whether life skills learned in adolescence successfully transferred into other contexts once participants entered young adulthood and to examine what facilitated the transfer of life skills to these contexts.

## Methods

### Context of the Present Study

*LiFEsports* is a SBPYD program at The Ohio State University developed and implemented by leaders in the Department of Athletics and College of Social Work. The flagship program within *LiFEsports* is a four-week summer camp that takes place on Ohio State's campus. Youth participants who attend *LiFEsports* are ages nine to fourteen years old and attend for four weeks, along with monthly sport clinics throughout the academic year. Among the four hundred to five-hundred youth served annually by the program over the past ten years, 80 percent to 90 percent identified as living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, and 75 percent to 90 percent self-reported their race/ethnicity as Black or African American. Youth are provided with transportation to and from the camp and receive free breakfast and lunch daily. The *LiFEsports* curriculum consists of fifteen total hours of sport-specific instruction, fifteen hours of healthy lifestyles lessons, and fifteen total hours of Chalk Talk, a play-based social skills curriculum grounded in four key social skills: self-control, effort, teamwork, and social responsibility (S.E.T.S.). In a typical day at *LiFEsports*, youth travel in groups between different sessions. Each day for the first three weeks, they

complete one hour of Chalk Talk and one hour of healthy lifestyles lessons. They also participate in a variety of sports and activities (e.g., basketball, lacrosse, soccer, dance). During Chalk Talk, staff and youth discuss the names, definitions, and possible applications of each of the four key social skills, and participate in different lessons where they have opportunities to role play and practice S.E.T.S. During the healthy lifestyles lessons, youth learn about nutrition and physical activity via discussions, drawings, role plays, and other hands-on activities. During every session, youth are encouraged to apply S.E.T.S. Staff also lead debriefings at the end of each session to encourage youth to reflect on how they did or did not successfully use S.E.T.S. and how they might continue to use S.E.T.S. in the future. Youth are given S.E.T.S. pins by program staff when they successfully display one of the four life skills. In the last week of the summer camp, youth participate in the *LiFEsports* Games, a multiday event where youth demonstrate their life and sport skills through a variety of sport and problem-solving activities.

Prior to camp beginning, staff undergo rigorous training where they learn about the fundamentals of youth development, crisis interventions, support, life skill development and transfer, and sport. During the training, staff are provided numerous opportunities to practice S.E.T.S. and the lessons they will lead during camp. The training sessions are led by the full-time staff members of *LiFEsports*, who each hold a master's and/or doctoral degree in social work, sport leadership, sport psychology, and/or another related discipline. The staff that are hired for the *LiFEsports* summer camp have a variety of backgrounds in social work, counseling, education, sport management, and coaching, among others.

Importantly, the development of *LiFEsports* is rooted in theory and empirical research evidence. The curriculum draws from a variety of theories, models, and research studies, namely those rooted in PYD, such as the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As self-determination theory posits, *LiFEsports* places much attention on supporting youths' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *LiFEsports* also is informed by Pierce et al.'s (2017) sport-based life-skills transfer model. For instance, as suggested by the sport-based life-skills transfer model, *LiFEsports* emphasizes providing youth with opportunities to practice life skills and reflect on successful and unsuccessful applications of S.E.T.S. as well as future possible uses of S.E.T.S. *LiFEsports* also consists of a team of interdisciplinary researchers who regularly conduct quantitative and qualitative investigations to determine how the program can continue to be improved to support youth success. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2021), for example, found that incentivizing youth with S.E.T.S. pins and verbally celebrating them when they successfully demonstrate use of one or more of the four key social skills increases adoption of S.E.T.S. over the four-week period of the camp. This finding reinforced the use of S.E.T.S. pins throughout camp.

Given the vast reach of the program, *LiFEsports* provides a prime opportunity for continued research on the influence of SBPYD. However, caution is advised when interpreting findings associated with this study. Specifically, *LiFEsports* is a unique program different from other SBPYD programs especially in relation to the amount of time participants engage in Chalk Talk and S.E.T.S. A strength of the model is the intentional focus and dosage, which are needed to strengthen sport-based programming (Anderson-Butcher, 2019). However, findings may not be generalizable to other SBPYD programs. Nevertheless, exploring life-skills transfer among former campers of *LiFEsports* can be helpful toward strengthening the impact of *LiFEsports* and for providing insight into future possible directions for other SBPYD programs.

## Procedures

Former *LiFEsports* participants and their families who had valid email addresses in their records and were in the *LiFEsports* summer camp between 2010 and 2017 received an email with information about the current study. That is, emails with information about the study were shared to 709 unique email addresses. Parents/caregivers who received the email were asked to share the information with their child(ren) who formerly participated in *LiFEsports*. Interested individuals who were over the age of eighteen and participated in *LiFEsports* four or more years ago (i.e., between 2010 and 2017) were invited to contact

one of the researchers to schedule an interview. Prior to conducting the interviews, potential participants provided consent and completed a demographic questionnaire.

After providing consent and scheduling interviews, participants completed semistructured interviews via Zoom between March and October 2021. The first and second authors developed the semistructured interview guide based on the curriculum and goals of LiFEsports as well as the sport-based life-skills transfer model. That is, to contextualize the study to LiFEsports, interview questions largely related to the understanding (e.g., “What does self-control mean to you?”) and application of S.E.T.S. (“Given your experience with LiFEsports, describe a time where you have used effort shortly after your experience in the camp. What about more recently?”). In addition, the sport-based life-skills transfer model indicates various personal and contextual factors influence the development and transfer of life skills. As such, participants were asked about what they believe influenced their use of S.E.T.S. (e.g., “What about LiFEsports may have impacted your effort today?”). They also were asked similar follow-up questions (e.g., “What else impacts your social responsibility today?”). Because support from others is an important aspect of the sport-based life-skills transfer model, participants also were asked questions about how staff may have influenced their current use of S.E.T.S. (e.g., “How do you think the coaches, staff, and volunteers played a role in how you view these today?”) as well as how others may have influenced their current use of S.E.T.S. (e.g., “How do you think others played a role in how you view and use these today?”). Many of these questions were general and broad to prevent the interviewer from misguiding participants and to remain open to the possibility that other factors and transfer contexts not mentioned in the model of sport-based life-skills transfer and not documented in prior research may be important. In total, the semi-structured interview guide contained thirty-three questions and probes. Additional follow-up and clarifying questions were also asked throughout the interviews based on the responses of the participants.

Moreover, prior to completing the interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted to receive interviewee feedback about the clarity of questions, flow of interview, and length of interview. Once feedback was obtained and integrated into the semistructured interview script, researchers scheduled and conducted the interviews. Interviews lasted between forty minutes and fifty-three seconds and one hour, nineteen minutes, and nineteen seconds ( $M =$  fifty-eight minutes and twenty-six seconds). Data continued to be collected until saturation was reached, which occurs when additional data do not provide new information and when responses from participants begin to be repetitive (Hennink et al., 2017; Kerr et al., 2010). Participants were given a twenty-five dollar gift card for their time. All activities were approved by the authors’ Institutional Review Board.

## Participants

Participants included thirteen individuals who were campers at LiFEsports prior to 2020. All participants self-identified as Black/African American and cisgender. Five participants identified as female, while eight identified as male. Participants were ages nineteen to twenty-five ( $M = 21$ ), though five participants did not report their age. In addition, four to eleven years ( $M = 8.85$ ) have passed since these individuals first participated in LiFEsports and two to ten years ( $M = 7.00$ ) have passed since they last participated in LiFEsports. Table 1 provides demographic details for each participant.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years Since First Participating in LiFEsports	Years Since Last Participating in LiFEsports
Abbie	24	Female	11	9
Aubrey	19	Female	6	4
Cassandra	21	Female	10	8
Cedric	25	Male	11	10

Deja	21	Female	11	8
Jacoby	20	Male	6	4
Lawrence	22	Male	11	9
Layla	21	Female	10	8
Malik	19	Male	5	2
Quinton	19	Male	4	4
Rashaun	25	Male	10	8
Terrell	22	Male	9	9

## Data Analysis

A pragmatist paradigm was adopted throughout the study and directly informed the data analysis. Pragmatists believe in mixing different research methods and paradigmatic values to explore research questions in ways that are optimal and appropriate (Johnson et al., 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In the present study, aspects of constructivism and postpositivism were integrated. More specifically, as aligned with constructivism, we understand multiple realities coexist and researchers can influence the co-construction of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Postpositivists similarly purport that the bias of researchers influences findings but attempt to mitigate this bias as much as possible to develop the strongest understanding of the truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By integrating these two paradigms within pragmatism, we believe multiple truths can exist and, to develop a stronger understanding of these many truths, we must attempt to reduce our bias and be as objective as possible.

To complement the pragmatic nature of the study, thematic analysis was used to identify themes regarding life-skill development and transfer, especially in relation to the four life skills taught at *LiFEsports* (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Thematic analysis uses an inductive approach to explore the data and identify themes in six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the first author familiarized themselves with the data by reading the transcripts from each interview. Second, the same researcher identified preliminary codes throughout the transcripts. Third, the first and second authors discussed the codes and examined patterns among them. Fourth, the first author reviewed the themes to ensure the themes made sense and the data fit within them. Fifth, the researchers labeled the themes. Sixth, the researchers organized the themes. At each stage of the data-analysis process, codes were quantitized to mitigate the potential effects of bias in impacting the analysis. Specifically, the frequency of codes was relied on to identify prominent codes and themes in the data. This analytic strategy assists researchers in decreasing ambiguity on whether a particular pattern is present in the data and aligns with postpositivism (Sandelowski et al., 2009). Quantitizing the data was especially helpful in the present study as each of the researchers were involved with *LiFEsports*. Indeed, quantitizing the data helped to minimize bias when coding the data and organize the codes into themes. Although the frequency of codes aided the data analysis, the focus remained on amplifying the stories shared by the participants, as is common in qualitative research (Nzabonimpa, 2018).

Additional steps were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis based on the pragmatic intertwining of constructivism and postpositivism (Rose & Johnson, 2020). For example, after each interview, the interviewer completed a memo with reflections from the interview (Ortlipp, 2008), An approach that aligns with strengthening trustworthiness in constructivism (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Similarly, the researchers engaged in reflexivity, recognizing biases, another approach that aligns with constructivism (Rose & Johnson, 2020). For instance, the authors all are White while all the participants were Black. Racial differences may play a role in how participants and researchers interact. Also, although the authors each have experience as staff for *LiFEsports* programming, none of the authors were previous campers in *LiFEsports*. The second and third authors each worked in *LiFEsports* while the participants were campers; though only the first author, who did not work in *LiFEsports* while the participants were



campers, recruited and interviewed participants. As such, the mutual connection through LiFEsports allowed the researchers to quickly build rapport with participants, allowing them to feel comfortable expressing their experiences without being influenced by prior relationships and experiences. Researchers also sought peer/expert feedback throughout the research process (Padgett, 2017), an approach common in both constructivism and postpositivism (Rose & Johnson, 2020). That is, the first author regularly met with individuals who have research and clinical expertise in SBPYD to identify patterns and gaps in the data. Data also were triangulated by the parents/caregivers of the participants. Having multiple sources share the same information increases the confirmability of the findings and deepens understanding of the phenomenon (Mathison, 1988), and is one of the most common tactics used in postpositivism (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Together, these strategies helped to strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of our analysis.

## Results

Findings revealed four contexts that reflected where participants transferred S.E.T.S. following program participation. There also were five primary facilitators of life-skill transfer. Figure 1 highlights the relationship between the facilitators and transfer contexts, depicting the facilitators as influencing the successful application of S.E.T.S. in four different contexts.

**Figure 1.** *S.E.T.S Transfer*



### S.E.T.S. Transfer

#### Individual: Health and Well-Being

Eleven participants mentioned using S.E.T.S. to improve their individual health and well-being—eight participants described using S.E.T.S. when implementing self-care and general well-being strategies, and six shared they use S.E.T.S. in other sport and exercise settings. Abbie, for example, said remembering self-care takes effort and self-control. When asked about how LiFEsports has impacted her self-control, she said:

So, after a breakup, I was in therapy and I was still fighting the fact that, in every session, maybe like do the mechanisms, but it didn't start working until after I really got out, because then I started

to have real-life issues and I had to work through them. I think someone just said to me today or yesterday, “You’re always going to get waves in life, and you have to either surf them or you have to be still or you have to ride them.” I think that helped a lot with therapy, because you’re always going to get issues, so you can be still or you can let that situation take over you.

Jacoby shared he uses self-control to eat healthier foods, and Aubrey said she uses social responsibility when focusing on self-care. Specifically, she said, “You got to have social responsibility to not be doing drugs or drinking,” when engaging in self-care. Six participants stated they use S.E.T.S. in sport and exercise settings. In response to the interviewer asking about current use of effort following their time in *LiFEsports*, Rashaun said,

Now I work out all the time and try to put effort into that. Right now, my back is sore. Now, I’m actually working out a lot more often and trying to stay healthy. Working out, you got to put in effort. I did gain like twenty pounds.

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

All participants said they used S.E.T.S. in interpersonal relationships with their parents, siblings, children, significant others, friends, peers, mentees, or strangers. In response to being asked about current use of teamwork, many participants referred to their families and others as members of a team. Quinton, for example, described how families require teamwork: “I look at my family as a team. We help each other out. You know, one of us cleans or one of us is cooking.” Similarly, Rashaun talked about how he uses self-control and teamwork with his children. He also specified that these skills came from his experience at *LiFEsports*. He said:

Being able to play with them, understanding how he plays and teaching him self-control because he doesn’t know that he’s not supposed to put his hands in a toilet and not supposed to take things out of the trash can and not supposed to put things in his mouth and not getting upset. That’s the thing about it. You constantly have to keep telling them these things and they’re not going to listen . . . They’re not going to hear you until the fourth or fifth time. It’s kind of like having that patience, and to understand children came a lot from *LiFEsports* to be honest.

Every participant also detailed how part of their successful transfer of S.E.T.S. involved relationship-building skills. Lawrence described how he used more effort to talk to girls as potential romantic partners following participation in *LiFEsports*. He said, “[*LiFEsports*] helped me talk to more girls . . . I used to be a shier person.” Rashaun explicitly tied relationship-building skills to effort. He said, “I was one of the shy kids that didn’t talk to nobody . . . I started trying to talk to people—start trying to put effort into everything I did.”

### **Social Settings: Work and School**

Twelve participants recalled transferring S.E.T.S. to work. They described S.E.T.S. in relation to performing job-specific duties, creating and accomplishing career goals, cooperating with coworkers, and maintaining high-quality customer-service skills. Xavier, for example, was one of seven participants who mentioned how S.E.T.S. can be used to accomplish job-specific duties. He said:

I work from home, so I have to have a lot of self-control to be able to sit down on my laptop and be able to pay attention and do my work. I do project management and I do some software development, so by being able to sit down on my laptop, that’s self-control. If I’m going to be a little more specific,

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when it comes to, like, impulses, I do think that I am able to control my actions a lot more, especially in situations to where I'm more kind of under pressure, more fast-paced, like camp was very fast-paced.

Six participants also mentioned they used S.E.T.S. when creating and accomplishing career goals. When asked about how she uses effort, Layla shared she uses effort to continue working and advancing her education. She said,

In the hospital, like they want all RNs [registered nurses], and it's hard to go to school and work. At the nursing home you could be an LPN [licensed practical nurse] and work to get your RN and they'll still pay you really good. I'm really good with older people, but I want to try kids eventually.

Another five participants further described how S.E.T.S. can be used when working with customers. In particular, self-control was often transferred to customer-service skills. When asked about how he has used self-control after his participation in LiFEsports and more recently, Cedric explained:

There's plenty of opportunities to have a problem with just whether a customer doesn't think I'm providing the level of service that they're expecting or a coworker isn't contributing to the workspace in a way that I would personally like. There's all these opportunities to have issues come up. However, my self-control is more geared toward trying to understand their perspective in these situations—the other person's perspective in these situations—and then showing grace and kindness toward them even if I don't necessarily agree with what they're doing or what they have or what they've said, and then also, after coming to that understanding, basically just putting myself in a position of being someone of service to them and helping them and helping us get on the same page; that helps to temper my immediate emotions and then actually work toward a solution.

Furthermore, nine participants said they continue to use S.E.T.S. during school. Former campers stated they used S.E.T.S. to maintain effort, manage their time, and complete group projects. Cassandra, for instance, shared how she used effort and self-control in school, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Quinton also suggested effort and self-control are important for school. He said, "I just want to quit sometimes . . . Instead of trying to go at [professors], sometimes I got to hold myself accountable and work harder than what I did before."

## Social Justice and Civic Activities

Ten participants highlighted how they have transferred S.E.T.S. to social justice and civic activities in their communities. Participants discussed using S.E.T.S. with antiracism and racial diversity, homelessness and hunger, and general community service. Four participants mentioned using S.E.T.S. to promote antiracism and racial diversity. Cassandra said protesting takes teamwork because "there's strengths in numbers and so the more people and the more influence you can have at all these demonstrations." Malik also said:

Coming to campus, there was already an issue with [racism], like somebody was being insensitive towards people of color. There was a position, the campus unity position. That man was—the guy who had that position—was saying that he cannot confirm nor deny systemic racism, and it's just like . . . we went up in arms. That's when I saw like, wow, this is a PWI [predominantly White institution], but I can still find my people, and I can still have my protection, my voice . . . We rallied. We had a march. We had speeches. I gave a speech. We went into the student senate meeting and we talked about the issue and it was just a great instance of just unity.

[Malik added] If it wasn't for some of the people at LiFEsports, I probably would not have

been as vocal as I am today about my beliefs. They fostered me into this person that just is very secure. I have full self-control, is the best way to put it.

Xavier contributed to promoting racial diversity in other ways. He shared:

I started [an organization]. We're partnered with Google, so and it's focused on bringing cloud technology or bringing digestible cloud concepts to Black African Americans or Black Americans that wouldn't have opportunities to those resources otherwise.

Meanwhile, four participants use S.E.T.S. to help community members struggling with homelessness and hunger and other community-based initiatives. Much of the work with homelessness and hunger was related to volunteering with a church. Indeed, Layla said, "For Thanksgiving, we fed all the homeless people in the area and passed out blankets and different stuff like that." By working with other members of the church to help community members, Layla demonstrated both teamwork and social responsibility.

## Facilitators of Life-Skills Transfer

### Socialization with Other Youth

All participants mentioned the opportunity to socialize with other youth during *LiFEsports* facilitated their current use of S.E.T.S. Participants said being around a diverse group of youth, including youth who looked like them, made them feel safe and motivated them to become more engaged. When reflecting on her experience at *LiFEsports*, Abbie simply stated, "Being around a diverse group of people helped me to put the effort in to just be myself." That is, participants felt safe to put forth the effort to be themselves and engage with others. According to participants, the number of youths at camp facilitated the development of friendships, which made them feel more capable of learning and transferring S.E.T.S. Lawrence said, "Even though I already knew a lot of people when I went there, I would still make friends with people I never met before from all over the city, so when you learn how to make solid friendships, you can do anything honestly." Rashaun further explained the friendships developed at *LiFEsports* expanded his social network, allowing him to build his business, where he continues to use S.E.T.S.:

It definitely helped me build a, like, close network of friends, trying to be able to, like, to spread my own business, because now I'm a tattoo artist. Where I am in my life, I need that word of mouth and I need people to understand what I do and how to get in contact with me.

### Staff Support

Every participant described the importance of staff support. That is, participants perceived the staff at *LiFEsports* were supportive and positive, which they insisted promoted life-skill development and transfer. Abbie, Cedric, and Deja indicated coaches taught them how to be present, give advice to others, and stay positive. Eleven participants also said staff emphasized S.E.T.S., facilitating transfer. Aubrey recalled staff reiterating, "You will be using this after *LiFEsports*. You will be using this. This will help you." Quinton added, "Just them reiterating it to us . . . We focus on each word each week and after a while, it's kind of something that gets submitted into your head after, especially if you've been with the camp for years." Staff also influenced the participants' abilities to transfer S.E.T.S. by modeling appropriate behaviors. Cassandra spoke to this, saying:

I think their demonstrations of S.E.T.S. definitely help, because if they aren't leading by example,

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then what do we have to follow? But they were leading by example that we were able to closely follow . . . I think it was most valuable when they would participate with us because it sounds like we're not, but even if it's something that we didn't want to do and even the coaches didn't want to do it, having them participate motivated us to do it as well.

Participants admired the staff and wanted to follow their actions. Rashaun shared:

A lot of the kids that come into this camp probably don't . . . even have a parent, a father figure to show them. That is why *LiFEsports*—I mean, like, to be honest, I didn't have a father figure. When I came to this camp, it helped me a lot because I've seen a lot of guys in this camp that are, like, role models to me and helped me grow into the person I am today.

### Practice Opportunities and Reinforcements

Thirteen participants discussed the value of opportunities to practice S.E.T.S. By having fun and playing sports with other youths, participants felt more engaged in learning life skills through sport. Xavier stated, "I had fun. I like being around people that look like me, I like being outdoors, I like playing sports, I like the variety of sports that I did play . . . *LiFEsports* taught me how to incorporate sports or sport fundamentals into everyday walk of life." Participants mentioned how the provision of diverse and unique sport opportunities was important to keeping *LiFEsports* fun and exciting, which encouraged effort. Layla noted, "I never knew how to play [lacrosse]. Then come to find out, I was really good at it. Just from like playing at *LiFEsports*, doing it, but it wasn't a sport that I would just be like, 'Oh, Mom, sign me up for lacrosse.'"

Five participants insisted the tangible rewards associated with using S.E.T.S. throughout camp also influenced transfer. Giving youth pins when they successfully demonstrated S.E.T.S. in the moment and recognizing individuals for their accomplishments at the end of the camp, such as by naming a Camper of the Year, encouraged participants to continue applying S.E.T.S. in various settings. Layla explained,

Every time you do something here, you get an effort badge. You put it on your book bag, then you go home. You're getting on the bus, and somebody said that they got a self-control badge and you're like, "Oh, I'm trying to get that one." And if you have all of them, it's like the top of the camp, like you're feeling good about yourself.

### Participation in Other Programs

Ten participants suggested participating in other programs that emphasize life-skill development and transfer also facilitated their transfer of S.E.T.S. In fact, seven participants discussed the importance of the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA), an extension of *LiFEsports* for high school youth to learn more about S.E.T.S., engage in the community, and serve as leaders for younger youth at *LiFEsports*. Rashaun shared details about how YLA impacted him:

[YLA] allowed us to like see like, man, this school is so big. There's so much to do. It kind of widened our eyes to see that there's a lot more in the world than rappers and drugs and money, and especially for inner-city kids like I was. I went to a public school all my life. So, it was kind of like all I see was drugs and music, and the way you can even get out of here is playing basketball or making a rap career for yourself, so it kind of opened our eyes to see there's more to life than just becoming a rapper or a basketball player. You can be a dentist, can be a social worker.

YLA exposed youth to other possibilities for their life trajectories. Similarly, YLA encouraged youth to network, take risks to advance their goals, and advocate for change. Former campers argued participating in other sports and leadership groups also facilitated transfer by providing additional opportunities to learn and practice S.E.T.S.

## Family Support

Ten participants suggested that support from family boosted the transfer of S.E.T.S. Family, especially moms, encouraged them to not give up and to apply S.E.T.S. to other settings. Deja described how her mom impacted her effort: “My mom pushes me to do my best, encourages me to do things that I don’t want to do, try out new things, try different things out. She’s, like, my role model. Like, she makes me never want to give up even though I want to so badly.” According to some participants, family members further supported the transfer of S.E.T.S. by explicitly discussing S.E.T.S. with their children and by giving their children additional rewards for earning S.E.T.S. pins, which are tangible proof that they successfully demonstrated one of the skills during camp. Malik shared, “My mom amplified [the importance of getting a S.E.T.S. pin] when we got home . . . If we got a certain number of pins, we get, like, prizes and stuff. We get to go to eat wherever we want or something like that.”

Family members also facilitated S.E.T.S. transfer by continuing to encourage their children as they progressed into young adulthood. Put differently, explicit reminders encouraged some former campers to continue applying S.E.T.S. to different environments. Aubrey explained:

My mom’s way of helping me to use it today is like checking on me to make sure I’m doing good, I’m putting in the effort to go outside my comfort zone still, which actually helped me a lot to be more involved, to use my leadership skills from *LiFEsports*, because she’d be like, “You remember *LiFEsports*? You can use that now. You can help other people. Other students.”

## Discussion

Life skills are important developmental assets that help youth buffer risks and increase their protective factors over time (Camiré et al., 2012). This qualitative study with former SBPYD participants sought to examine whether life skills learned in adolescence through a SBPYD program successfully transferred into other contexts once participants entered young adulthood and to examine what mechanisms or factors facilitated the transfer of life skills to these contexts later in life. Overall, the former *LiFEsports* participants who engaged in this study reported continued use of life skills learned in sports after they were no longer in the program and as they entered young adulthood. Several participants discussed how learning S.E.T.S. made them feel empowered and educated, resulting in applications of related skills to their own health and well-being and to personal relationships. Participants gave specific examples of how these skills, especially effort and self-control, helped them engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors and relationally as parents, friends, or leaders.

Further, S.E.T.S. were reportedly transferred into school settings, which is in keeping with prior findings by Newman (2020) and Pierce et al. (2022). In addition, however, participants also reported transferring skills to the workplace. For example, several participants mentioned how S.E.T.S. transferred to their jobs when working in customer-service roles and articulating their career goals. Namely, relationship skills emerged here as customers and coworkers are important to the success of employees in the workplace. This transfer of life skills to the workplace complements prior research on the model of sport-based life-skills transfer (Pierce et al., 2017), and suggests SBPYD programs may contribute to youth-development

outcomes beyond the time of involvement in sport. However, there are many external factors, separate from *LiFEsports*, that also may have affected participants' use of S.E.T.S. in these settings. For instance, participants may have developed and refined S.E.T.S. in other settings outside of *LiFEsports*, such as at home, school, work, and other youth programs. Nonetheless, evidence of the application of S.E.T.S. after participating in *LiFEsports* provides early evidence that youth from *LiFEsports* can and do transfer life skills that are emphasized in *LiFEsports* to other settings throughout their early adulthood.

Another important finding to highlight is the transfer of skills into social justice and civic activities in communities. Participants in our study reported using S.E.T.S. to support advocacy efforts and engagement in community service activities. Youth shared they felt empowered by the skills they learned at *LiFEsports*, and they used these skills to promote racial equity and social justice. They also sought to increase access to sport for others, as in the case of the participant and her father who offered free sport lessons. Results point toward a potential ripple effect of promoting social responsibility through engaging in a SBPYD program, and how this transfer of skills can lead toward an affinity for supporting and caring for others. Notably, though, external factors also likely played roles in encouraging social justice and civic engagement. For example, the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, increased media coverage and knowledge of racial injustice, contentious elections, and unjust policies all have been identified as important societal facilitators that encourage advocacy (Scheidler et al., 2024). These factors are especially important to acknowledge given the interviews were conducted in 2021, shortly after the widespread news of police violence against George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among many others. In addition, these factors are important to acknowledge as all participants identified as young Black adults, a population that largely identified with and led protests for Black Lives Matter (Nardini et al., 2021).

Within communities, especially those experiencing the structural effects of oppression and subsequent social inequities, this finding is paramount. If youth participants can feel empowered and supported through SBPYD programs, then they can advocate and identify solutions to community problems that are inclusive of their own social and cultural norms. Furthermore, they can feel more confident about getting involved in civic activities to improve conditions and promote social change. Our study also identified facilitators of postparticipation life-skill transfer. Similar to findings from Newman and Anderson-Butcher (2021) and Allen et al. (2015), we found relationships with other youth, family members, and program staff were critical to the integration of skills beyond sport. Staff support, modeling behaviors, and practice opportunities that were fun, safe, and unique were influential facilitators of long-term life-skills transfer (Newman & Anderson-Butcher, 2021). Maximizing teachable moments and reinforcing skills with tangible rewards further proved to be essential to facilitating the model of sport-based life-skills transfer. Peer valuation also supported growth and learning, both in the setting and after participation ended (Pierce et al., 2022). Participants also shared being around a diverse group of youth, including youth who looked like them, made them feel safe and motivated them to become more engaged in the sport and social skill lessons. Findings corroborate prior research on life-skills transfer and show these mechanisms have the potential to translate into long-term developmental outcomes for youth participants, especially as they enter early adulthood.

Our results suggest frequency may be a key factor in facilitating long-term life-skill transfer. Participants consistently shared how continued participation in other programs that encourage the development and application of S.E.T.S. promoted life-skill transfer. YLA is a unique extension of *LiFEsports* that is unlike many other SBPYD programs. This extension of *LiFEsports* for high school youth promoted additional learning opportunities, stronger relationships over time, and additional opportunities to learn and apply skills. For SBPYD programs, continued retention of youth and pathways to leadership are likely important to successfully buffering risks and increasing protective factors over time (Bates et al., 2020). Providing older youth with opportunities to teach the skills to younger youth in a "ladder to leadership" model likely also reinforces lessons, applications, and future integration of skills into one's life. It is critical to consider

funding, staffing, and intentional programming when thinking about how to retain youth for long periods of time to further support positive outcomes through SBPYD programs.

## Implications and Limitations

Our study elevates the perspective of former youth participants in SBPYD programs and describes how these programs contribute to their long-term success and the transfer of key life skills to other developmental time periods. For program leaders, results point toward the importance of training staff in PYD principles and ensuring they are able to identify teachable moments and reinforce skills learned in sport that extend into life. Trainings, in particular those for SBPYD, should provide opportunities to practice leading sessions and debriefs where life-skills transfer is explicitly discussed with real-world examples. Moreover, staff can utilize findings to help participants reflect on how skills may transfer to the workplace, perhaps in relationships with customers, bosses, or coworkers, and how they might draw on skills in the face of adversity, such as an unanticipated emergency or a change in plans/lifestyle norms. In addition, providing youth with ongoing opportunities to remain involved in further programs postinvolvement will encourage sustained use of S.E.T.S. In *LiFEsports*, for example, youth have the opportunity to participate in YLA when they enter high school to continue learning about S.E.T.S. and to continue preparing for their futures. SBPYD programs also should consider adapting elements of *LiFEsports*, such as Chalk Talk and S.E.T.S. pins, into their own programs. Integrating these elements may be important for encouraging life-skills transfer in other SBPYD programs (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021). By leveraging sports as a context to teach and reach, youth development leaders, social workers, policymakers, and researchers can support youth in developing their sense of self, social identities, and friendships as well as engagement in civic and social issues in their communities.

This study is not devoid of limitations. First, participants who consented to engage in interviews may have been those who enjoyed the program more and may have reported more favorably due to their positive experiences in the program. Further, participants were recruited using convenience sampling methods and via email, likely resulting in a biased sample of those with access to technology and those with more time to engage in research activities. Notably, these participants' experiences may not be representative of others who participated in the program in the past, and attending *LiFEsports* during different program years may have altered their experiences in different ways. Indeed, those who responded to the invitation to participate in the study may hold more positive feelings toward *LiFEsports*. That is, those who had a negative experience with *LiFEsports* may have opted not to participate in the present study. Additionally, *LiFEsports* is a unique program different from other SBPYD programs. As such, these findings may not generalize to other SBPYD settings. Also, the researchers do not reflect the backgrounds or developmental age ranges of those who collaborated with them on this research project. Finally, the researchers have experience working with participants in the program, resulting in the potential to bias our results toward favorable learnings or outcomes.

Our findings can be used to inform future research, including but not limited to future longitudinal studies that examine the influence of SBPYD programs over time. One important contribution that should continue to be built upon is the examination of how investments in youth through SBPYD translate into long-term, positive outcomes. Cost analyses linking investments in SBPYD to outcomes such as improved economic security through the workforce or entry into college would be powerful to distill in this area of research. The present work speaks to the potential for this type of inquiry to demonstrate the influence of community investments in sports, recreation, and play that also teach and model positive life skills. Our study may inform the future design and integration of SBPYD programs into communities that serve socially vulnerable youth and can be leveraged for advocacy to describe how these programs facilitate life skill development and transfer in the long term. Other future studies should consider exploring life-skills



transfer among young adults who had negative experiences during their time in SBPYD programs and explore long-term life-skills transfer in other SBPYD programs.

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