

## ACTIVITY: Gratitude Letter

### Purpose

- Boost resiliency through the practice of expressing gratitude

### ESTIMATED TIME

10 minutes

### MATERIALS

#### Required:

- A. Thank you cards
- B. Pen

### Background

A number of studies have looked at the benefits of gratitude. Gratitude has a strong link to mental health and satisfaction with life. People who are grateful experience higher levels of positive emotions, such as joy, love, happiness, and optimism. People who practice gratitude are better able to deal with everyday stress and more resilient to trauma-induced stress.

There are many ways to practice gratitude, including keeping a gratitude journal, making a list of things you are thankful for, and thanking others. In one study, resiliency researcher and author, Dr. Martin Seligman, had participants write a 300 word letter of thanks, then follow up by delivering and/or reading the letter to the recipient. This resulted in increased happiness and less depression for the writers for a month afterwards.

### Activity

- 1) Using the information on the previous page, discuss the role of gratitude with your group.
- 2) Instruct participants to think of someone in their life who has helped them or supported them in some way. If possible, think of someone that you have never really thanked for their help or support.
- 3) Pass out thank you cards and envelopes to participants.
- 4) Instruct participants to write a detailed thank you note to this person with the intention of delivering this card to the recipient.
- 5) Tell participants they can mail the letter if needed. However, if possible, it's recommended they deliver and read the letter in person.

### Discussion Questions/ Key Points

- How does the idea of delivering and reading the card in person make you feel?
- Was it difficult or easy to think of someone you had never really thanked?
- How did it feel to express your gratitude in writing?
- How might writing out notes of thanks contribute to improving relationships or promoting optimism in our lives?

### Follow-up

Follow up with the team in a month or more and discuss how the activity went. Did some people deliver and read their thank you notes in person? How was it received? How did they feel after?

**Thanking Others Is Actually Good for YOU, Research Confirms.** Erin Leyba LCSW, Ph. D. Psychology Today. Accessed 11/15/2017 at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/joyful-parenting/201605/thanking-others-is-actually-good-you-research-confirms>

**Gratitude as a Psychotherapeutic Intervention.** Robert A. Emmons and Robin Stern. JOURNAL OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: IN SESSION, Vol. 69(8), 846–855 (2013). Accessed 11/15/2017 at: <http://ei.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/jclp22020.pdf>