



# PROJECT SUCCESS

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2019-2020 Impact Report



Communities  
In Schools

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South Central Texas



ALUMNI



Communities  
In Schools  
South Central Texas

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## Our Beginning

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Every year 1.2 million students drop out of high school. In other words, every twenty-six seconds a student in America loses his or her path to a better future (Miller, 2015). By empowering students to stay in school and achieve in life, we are building a stronger America, where every person is capable of reaching his or her greatest potential. During the 2005 - 2006 school year CIS developed an initiative to bridge the high school to post-secondary education gap for CIS graduates called Project Success. For fourteen years, Project Success has served students who would otherwise have very limited knowledge of the college environment and the admissions process. Project Success strives to understand the first-generation college student, their barriers to success, the uncertainty they face and what is working in the field that propels them into marketable careers.

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## Our Approach

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Through a dual approach Project Success is able to provide on-going, comprehensive campus-based one-on-one and group counseling services, which include high school, college and career counseling and an intensive summer bridge program – Life Bootcamp - for recent CIS graduates. CIS alumni programming begins at that point and includes mentoring, year round engagement, and wilderness experiences in state and national parks. These diverse services are provided to at-risk youth from homes where the college experience is absent or limited and the skills that are necessary to navigate college and the workforce environments are also absent or limited.

# **Phase One**

## **High School Project Success and Life Bootcamp**

Phase One services have provided college and career counseling support on 6 high school campuses in Comal and Guadalupe counties. Weekly large group one-hour meetings have taken place in a computer lab or high school career center during class periods and lunch. During these meetings students have been able to research and apply to colleges, sign up for SAT and ACT tests, apply for financial aid and scholarships, learn about marketable careers, attend field trips to colleges and universities, learn about college transition and professor expectations, and acquire the skills necessary to register for classes. During 2019-20, COVID 19 posed a new challenge to meeting the needs of our seniors. Once schools moved to online learning, Project Success was quick to respond and provided our seniors weekly small group and individual college counseling via Zoom.

Phase One services included our intense summer bridge program, Life Bootcamp, which has been developed and hosted by our organization since 2014. Over the last 7 summers, CIS high school graduates have grown with us and developed the skills needed to be successful in college, workforce, and life. Bootcamp provided "bootcampers" a variety of activities with "Harry Potter" themed sessions that correlate with college and workforce survival. This includes leadership skills, team building activities, and GRIT training (persistence, determination, and resilience). Community leaders and college professors are key to the students' learning as they came to speak to the group about college and work life expectations. What is unique about our Summer Bootcamp program is that CIS alumni co-facilitate the program and give a firsthand look at what at-risk and first-generation college students face.

# Phase One

(continued)

Due to COVID-19, Summer 2020 posed new opportunities and changes to Bootcamp programming. In May, when Governor Abbott allowed overnight and day camps to open, we REJOICED! It meant that our life-changing program could go on! But with the excitement of programming came a lot of safety precautions. We put into place the Governors day and overnight camp standards as well as the standards set out by the CDC for camps and wilderness programs. We developed an administrative Risk Management Team and had a doctor on call should we have concerns about COVID related issues. Eight CIS Alumni co-facilitated and helped with administrative tasks during our 6 weeks of programming. Bootcamp included 9 days of Zoom Camp, which was held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 10AM-12PM. Campers were provided a week long camping trip/lock in as well as 2 days of in-person day camp, and a 2-day mentor and mentee day trip. With lots of training, hand washing, and mask wearing, our summer was a lifesaving, life-changing success. Our peer mentors were trained, our campers camped, and not one person got COVID. Hallelujah!

## Phase Two

### Alumni Engagement, Alumni Assoc Board, Alumni Leader Peer Mentors, and Wilderness Camping Trips

Phase Two services are targeted towards alumni who have graduated high school and are engaged in post-secondary activities and are willing to volunteer for the CIS affiliate. Alumni engagement began the day of high school graduation and provided on-going college and workforce counseling, crisis and therapeutic counseling, and support to our alumni on an as-needed basis. These services specifically addressed homesickness, family dynamics, mental health, and relationship issues, fitting into the college and career environment, college jargon, financial stress, and transferring colleges. Through face-to-face facilitated interactions, more than 100 alumni are provided opportunities to engage with one another, encourage each other and to share their experiences with the group so they can learn how to be prepared for the unexpected. Alumni volunteered for CIS at community events, facilitated high school field trips at the colleges they attend, volunteered as alumni leaders at Life Bootcamp, became mentors, volunteered as Camp Operations on wilderness camping trips, and served on our Alumni Association Board.

During 2019-20, our alumni association board began meeting the needs of our alumni through fundraising efforts, a webpage, social media, and with virtual and in person engagement opportunities. Twelve (12) alumni sat on our working alumni board and participated in 3 committees: Alumni Engagement, Social Capital, and Strategic Communications. Alumni Association members paid yearly dues, which help fund alumni engagement activities.

## Phase Two


(continued)

Phase two services also included alumni volunteering at our intense summer bridge program, Life Bootcamp. What is unique about our Summer Bootcamp program is that CIS alumni co-facilitate the program and give campers an experienced view of the challenges most often faced by at-risk and first-generation college students.

Our alumni leader peer mentor training program includes diverse curriculums, which change on a yearly basis to train and then support alumni who apply to and are accepted into our Alumni Leader Program. Alumni who apply to become mentors must have completed at least one year of college, workforce, or military service and have maintained contact with CIS. The Alumni Leadership program trains these older alumni to be peer mentors to alumni who are first year college students or those who have chosen the workforce path. Alumni Leaders play an important role in helping both groups of students navigate their first year of college and workforce. Alumni Leader mentors are expected to have 3 contacts per month with their mentees. This included one face-to-face (Zoom include) interaction, one phone call, and one social media, text, or email interaction. These services are verified by mentors submitting monthly mentoring activity reports and participating on monthly zoom calls. During 2019-20, mentors had numerous opportunities to connect with their mentees during CIS hosted events. These opportunities included; CIS Family Reunion Camping Trip at Blanco State Park, November Volleyball Game, Alumni Winter Get Together, volunteering together at CIS events, and volunteering together as camp operations on camping trips.



# Wilderness Camping Trips



Our wilderness camping trips were created after we realized that our alumni needed sharpened skillsets to be able to compete and survive in college and workforce. In line with the concerns of top universities, college persistence, and the ability to push through difficult situations has become a teaching model for freshman. Over the past fifty years wilderness orientation programs for college students have expanded across the country. To date, 164 four-year universities provide incoming freshman with adventure programming geared to combat stress, encourage students to go beyond their comfort zone, enhance self-discovery, and develop a greater understanding of their relationship to others. As our program has grown, we've realized that the wilderness experience and experiential learning is imperative to the success of our at-risk first-generation college students.

This year marked our 9th anniversary of wilderness programming, which has always been provided at no cost to the alumni we serve. Past alumni leader camping trips have taken place at Davis Mountains State Park, Big Bend National Park, Palo Duro Canyon State Park, and Hueco Tanks State Historic Site. Through a myriad of experiential activities and wilderness therapy techniques alumni learn life skills and work through mental health and trauma experiences that might otherwise keep them from succeeding in college and life. Skills taught include: resiliency in all situations, to succeed in life you MUST adapt and overcome, the belief that you are greater than your circumstances, the beauty of life is in the journey, there are life lessons you can only learn on the trail, leave no trace ethics, to be a good steward in life you must respect nature and care for our world, and there is no CAN'T in life.

# Wilderness Camping Trips

## (continued)

The counseling that takes place and skills that are taught propel our students to great success and have taught them life lessons they would have otherwise not learned. As our students are entering the workforce and graduating from college we are hearing back from them that their work ethic, leadership, ability to work in groups, and professionalism blows employers away. Our alumni program is teaching the soft skills many millennials are missing as they enter the workforce.

Our wilderness programming would not be possible without our treasured partnership with Texas Parks and Wildlife's Texas Outdoor Family Program and the TPWD Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) Grant.

# The Reach of Our Wilderness Camping Trips

## Our Mission

During 2019-20, we were blessed to provide 7 wilderness camping trips to our alumni. The impacts that wilderness experiences have on our students have life long effects! These trips are the catalyst that our alumni need to make positive life choices and break generational dysfunction. These trips create a lifelong love for the outdoors, and increase resiliency, problem solving, communication, and the ability to take positive risks. Many of the students that we serve have unhealthy families and these trips allow for new beginnings and connection to a new family...their CIS family!

One hundred and fifteen (115) Bootcampers & alumni camped at diverse locations and journeyed through programming that taught different life lessons. Our 7 wilderness experiences took place at the following parks and partnership locations:

- Davis Mountain State Park
- Palmetto State Park
- Blanco State Park
- Government Canyon State Park
- The Barn at Cranes Mill
- Lazy L&L Campground

# HIGHLIGHTS

**126** seniors from our 6 high schools attended Project Success 1 or more times

**59** of those who stayed connected during COVID-19 were accepted into 2 and 4 year colleges

**35** high school students received scholarships totaling \$200,223

**10** Alumni graduated with Bachelor's Degrees

**10** Alumni received CIS Alumni Scholarships totaling \$66,000

**115** Alumni camped with us on one or more of our 7 wilderness trips

**79** seniors participated in Project Success 4 or more times

**2** joined the military

**28** Alumni Peer Mentors mentored 23 alumni mentees

**12** Alumni held positions on our Alumni Association Board

**51** Alumni volunteered for CIS, a total of 2,878 hours

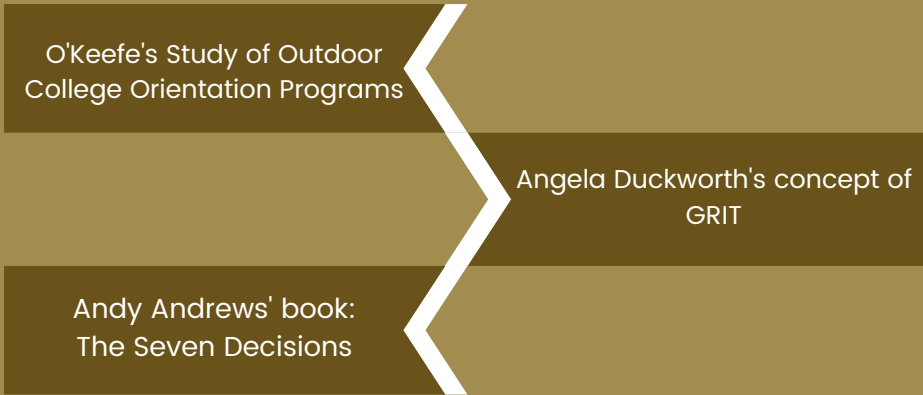
## Research Partnership

The St. Mary's University Office of Community-Based Research, directed by Dr. Rick Sperling, partnered with Project Success to complete an evaluation of the impact Bootcamp and wilderness programming has on our Bootcampers and alumni. Starting in February 2020, Dr. Sperling began meeting with CIS Admin Leadership, alumni, CIS Board Members, high school administration, and Project Success funders to distill our Theory of Change. These meetings resulted in the identification of instruments capable of measuring the changes we intended to produce and a plan for administration. During Summer 2020 Bootcamp, pretests & posttests were developed to measure changes in participants' view of themselves and the world, as well as their sense of personal control.

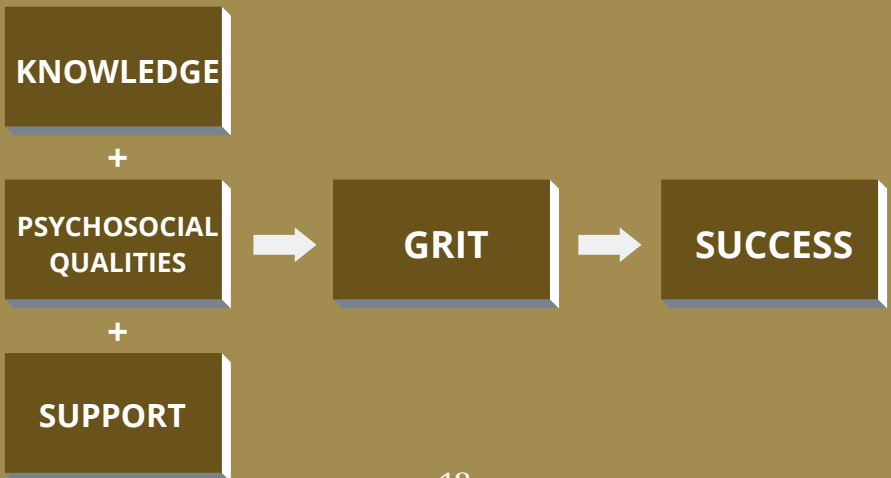
# The Results of Our Work

## Model of Bootcamp

Bootcamp challenges campers to develop the knowledge and dispositional attributes necessary to succeed in school. It draws on:



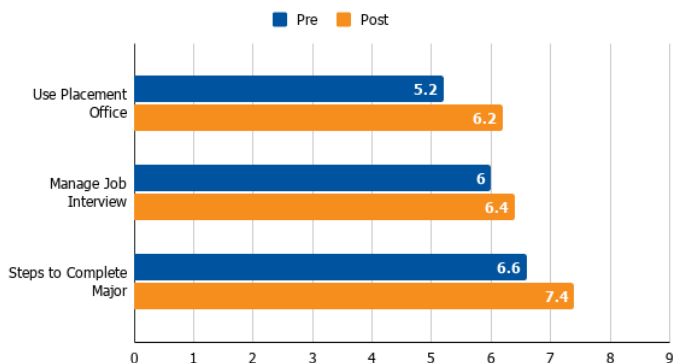
## Theory of Change



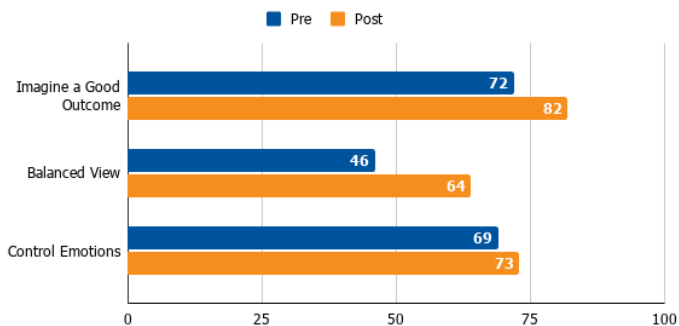
# The Results of Our Work in Boot Camp

Quantitative Data: Measuring Knowledge, Psychosocial Qualities, and Support

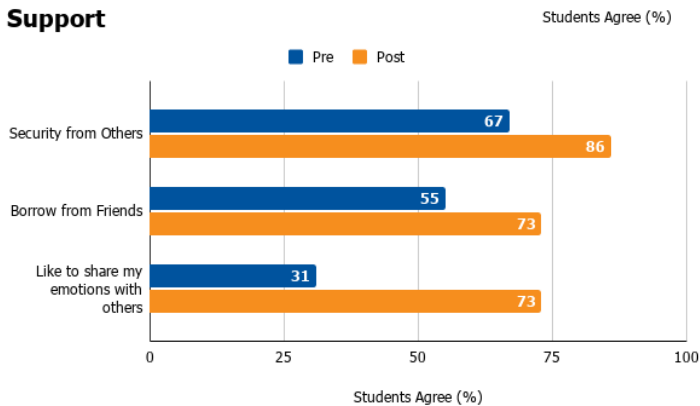
## Knowledge



## Psychosocial Qualities



## Support



# Population Served on Camping Trips

## We Help Students from All Backgrounds

Our population served a total of 115 students, from various backgrounds.

Together, we were able to serve students of ethnic minorities and low-income families. We were also able to serve students who faced physical, mental health, and/or educational challenges in the lives.

## Student Demographics: Percentages

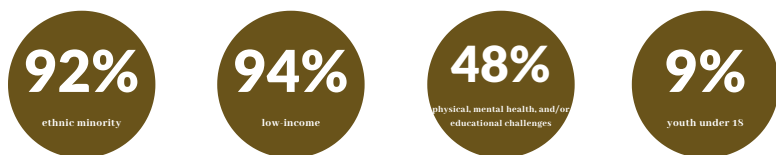


Figure 1: Student Demographics by Gender

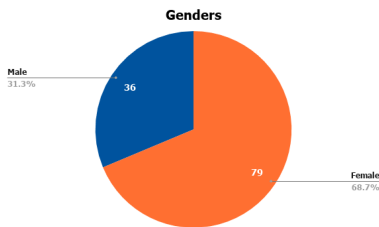
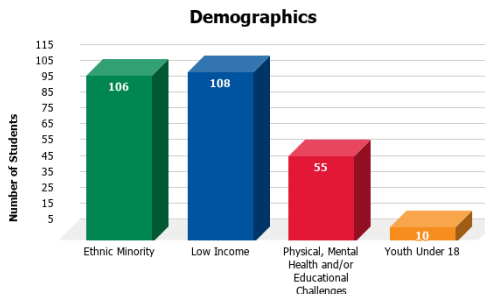


Figure 2: Student Demographics by Background





# From Our Alumni - The Impact

## Project Success has on their Lives

### Knowledge

"Before CIS, I never believed I could go to a real college."

-Trinity

### Knowledge

"CIS also helped me act when deciding on college and applying for both school and financial aid. If not for this organization, I do not believe that I would be in the same position to succeed that I am now." -John

### Goal Setting

"I've spent the better part of my life pleasing everyone to the point that I had no goals because every choice depended on the life of the people around me."

-Monse

### Positive Attributions

"During bootcamp I was able to learn about myself and to see the potential I really have. This camp and the people around me have given me strength and drive to believe in myself and give myself credit I deserve with pride and confidence." -Jorge

### Perseverance

"Even as life's challenges stagger my resolve, I will choose to get back up again. Even if I am met with failure after failure, I will continue on because I know that one day success will come."

-Kiana

### Social Support

"CIS and all the people in it are now like my second family. There are people that I can count on to be there for me and to support me with whatever, like college or personal problems."

-Maria

### Success

"I am currently a sophomore at the Alamo Colleges. I work at HEB. I will graduate in December 2021 and transfer to a four-year university to get my computer science degree."

-Dessah

### Appreciation

"I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for making this possible. I am forever appreciative of this experience as it will be one I will carry with me for the rest of my life."

-Jazmin

# Thank You

**This year was tough on people around the world. For the at-risk student who was quarantined at home with mental health issues, suicidal thoughts, extreme anxiety, abusive families, gang violence, poverty, limited access to technology or Wi-Fi, loss of jobs, and not enough food to feed a family it was devastating! Seniors around the country faced the loss of prom, senior events, and saying goodbye to teachers and friends. Our CIS kids faced that plus so much more. Summer was a saving grace for many of them. Literally, summer saved some of their lives and kept them from committing suicide. The fun, connection, and life-changing experiences our campers had while camping, getting fresh air, sunshine, participating in team building activities, and leadership development will have lasting effects. Project Success partners and donors blessed us with the ability to teach resiliency, GRIT, and coping skills. This allowed our alumni a year to process through life long trauma.**

**We could not positively impact the lives of our CIS Alumni without the investment, support, and involvement of our partners and donors. Thank you for your continuous blessings and for making Project Success programming possible to 126 high school seniors and for providing a wilderness camping opportunity to 115 Bootcampers & CIS Alumni.**

We'd like to thank our donors for their continuous support and for making this all possible:

Texas Parks and Wildlife  
CO-OP Grant

Texas Outdoor Family

Weisman Family

Hunter Industries

Jimmy and Sheila Jacobs

Grand Endeavor Homes

Caterpillar Foundation

Lazy L&L Campgrounds

Daniel Grove Photography

Dr. Rick Sperling  
*St. Mary's University*

Office of Community-Based Research  
*St. Mary's University*



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For more information, contact:

Liberty Nicholas, LCSW

Director of College and Alumni Initiatives

Communities In Schools of South Central Texas

161 S Castell Ave

New Braunfels, TX 78130

530.620.4247 x19 office 210.685.0711 cell

Visit Us @ [www.cis-sct.org](http://www.cis-sct.org)