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# In their shoes: coaches' and participants' experiences with a running-based youth development group

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dissertation

**IN THEIR SHOES:  
COACHES' AND PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES  
WITH A RUNNING-BASED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT**

This project explored the experiences of adolescents and adult coaches who took part in Sole Train, a running-based youth development group, during its 2015–2016 program.

Qualitative interviews about being “in the shoes” of four Sole Train coaches and five participants were conducted. Special attention was paid to whether and how Sole Train influenced participants’ psychological well-being levels (as defined by Ryff (1989)). Ryff (1989) described psychological well-being as including six dimensions; this study’s results suggested that for participants, each of these — self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy — were in some way affected by their involvement in Sole Train. Coaches reported observing changes in participants that aligned with these six dimensions, and participants discussed experiencing such changes.

Next, the type of climate coaches aimed to create and whether participants perceived the program to have a caring climate (as defined by Newton, Fry, Watson, Gano-Overway, Kim, Magyar and Guivernau (2007)) was examined. The results

suggested that coaches tried to create caring climates, and that participants experienced groups as caring. Other findings included that Sole Train was described as fun and joyful, that involvement benefited both participants and coaches, that both groups faced challenges, that Sole Train's caring climate may have influenced changes in participants' well-being levels, and that the act of running was an important part of Young Soles' experiences. Finally, the results support the idea that youth development through physical activity programs can impact those involved both physically and emotionally.

*Keywords:* psychological well-being, caring climate, youth development through physical activity groups.

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## **Chapter 1: Adolescents, Well-Being and Caring Climates**

Running — no matter your age, no matter the time of day or the weather — is often not easy; it works you physically, leaves you breathless, it can give you blisters or cramps. Running can feel like a chore at times, it can be mentally tough to continue when running or to beat prior running times or distances. Some people love running, some hate the act.

While some may love and some may loathe running, still others may have a complicated relationship with the sport. Research points to the existence of differing views on whether running, particularly distance running, is actually a positive, healthy activity, especially for youth and teens to take part in. Some literature suggests that youth may not be physically ready to handle training for long runs or races (particularly marathons) (Greene & Pate, 2015). Additionally, how one views running or one's participation in running, which is often grouped with “lean-sports,” or sports where controlling one's weight or being lean may be important, can have negative emotional implications and can, at times, be connected to health issues and disordered eating habits, particularly for young females (e.g., Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Reinking & Alexander, 2005). However, other research indicates that involvement in running activities can have physical and emotional benefits for young people and can improve self-esteem or body image views (e.g., Kalak et al., 2012; Sifers & Shea, 2013).

One indisputable fact, though, is that running can either take a runner away from something or bring them toward something; in that way, it can be transformative.

According to the youth development group, Sole Train: Boston Runs Together

(heretofore referred to as Sole Train), running, when done in the right setting and with the right support, can be a positive activity for young people to take part in. In fact, this program is based on the idea that running can actually positively change the lives of some of Boston's adolescents.

Sole Train was created with the goal of allowing adolescents in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, to experience all of the highs, lows, and potential personal growth that may be accessed through running. The program aims to use running as a vehicle through which adolescents challenge themselves physically and emotionally. Sole Train is designed to help participants both literally and figuratively move away from things that might be difficult and head toward success, opportunity and possibilities. The program also attempts to help young people become runners, connect with peers, and just have fun. Sole Train describes itself as,

A community-building and mentoring program that deconstructs [the] impossible by using running as a vehicle for setting and achieving seemingly impossible goals. With a supportive community of caring adults and peers, Sole Train champions young people as they realize their capacity for greatness (Sole Train's Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 4).

Sole Train is housed at various schools throughout Boston (each location is described in this study as a "Sole Train site"). Sole Train programming takes place after school, and includes training practices multiple times a week over the course of an

academic year. The goal is to prepare participants to complete either a five-mile or half marathon race at the end of programming. The program is also designed to integrate youth development lessons and life skills training into practices; therefore striving to help positively shape adolescent participants as runners and as people. Sole Train includes adult coaches and volunteers at each site. These people are charged with carrying out the program's mission and with supporting and guiding participants from the day they join until they successfully cross the finish line of a race at the program's end (and ideally after this, as the program aims to create meaningful, hopefully lasting, connections between all involved).

A large number of the young people who sign up to participate in Sole Train do not identify as athletes; they are not runners when they begin the program. They are simply adolescents — or young people between the ages of roughly 10–19 — dealing with the many physical and emotional changes and challenges that accompany this phase of life (“Adolescent health,” 2017). Sole Train includes a diverse group of adolescents; some are simply looking to take part in a fun after school activity or improve physically and run a race, and some may be dealing with more difficult personal situations.

Some participants are Boston Public School students of color who may have been impacted by systemic racism and/or are living (or have lived) in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and violence (Sole Train Logic Model Draft, 2015). In Sole Train's Program Guide (2012), the program stated that approximately eighty percent of Sole Train participants were living in Boston neighborhoods dealing with “higher than average levels of violence and poverty” (Sole Train Program Guide, 2012). While the Director of

Sole Train reported that the program does not currently have exact numbers, she estimated that now about ninety percent of participants are young people of color who have dealt with these types of troubling issues (J. Leffler, personal communication, May 1, 2017).

Some of these young people have been involved with the Department of Youth Services or deal with behavioral or emotional challenges (about five percent of current participants are or were involved with the Department of Youth Services, according to Sole Train’s Director) (J. Leffler, personal communication, May 1, 2017). Some are in need of a stronger “positive relational attachment” at school or in their communities (Sole Train Logic Model Draft, 2015). While it is challenging quantify the number of participants looking for a “positive relational attachment,” the Director of Sole Train stated, “100 percent are looking for a stronger relational attachment — I would argue that all young people are, even if they aren’t actively aware of it” (J. Leffler, personal communication, May 1, 2017).

Sole Train’s participants are not unlike the youth of Boston generally. This means that the needs of those involved with Sole Train, like the needs of the adolescents in Boston, vary. Some deal mainly with the more typical challenges that tend to accompany the transitional phase of adolescence, while many could be considered socially vulnerable<sup>1</sup>. Almost one quarter of Boston’s children live in “intense poverty”

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<sup>1</sup> Haudenhuyse, Theeboom and Coalter (2012) stated that terms like "at-risk," "underserved," "disaffected," "disadvantaged," "marginalized" (and more) have been "used to characterize youth who are perceived to be in need of intervention" (p. 438). They went on to explain, though, that unlike the term “socially vulnerable,” those terms focus on "individual agency," rather than taking individual's life experiences and interactions with "wide social structures into account" (pp. 438–439). Therefore, this dissertation will, at times, use the term "socially vulnerable," per

and deal with the complex issues that come with both that and navigating adolescence (Navin & Jaffe, 2005; Swahn & Bossarte, 2009).

Boston has a number of areas where unemployment, crime, and drug activity are prevalent issues (Navin & Jaffe, 2005; Swahn & Bossarte, 2009). Socially vulnerable youth from “urban, disadvantaged communities” like these are “significantly more likely” to engage in risky behaviors that could be detrimental to their futures (including behaviors related to drugs and violence) than their peers in other areas of the United States (Swahn & Bossarte, 2009, pp. 224–225). Finishing high school, having a job where there is potential to grow and learn, being in a “stable” relationship with another adult, and avoiding dangerous behaviors are all things that may be at risk when young people face negative personal, community or family situations (Irvy & Doolittle, 2003, p. 1).

All adolescents, regardless of what they are dealing with in their homes, communities, or personal lives, are vulnerable to a degree. For most adolescents, this period of life can include a heightened focus on one’s physical appearance, struggles with low self-confidence, moodiness, shifts in peer and familial relationships, stress because of school work, and even feelings of sadness and depression (“Young teens,” “Teenagers,” 2017). A variety of things — both internal resources and external supports — could help to combat the challenges of adolescence, even for those facing severe risks during this phase. This study explored two of things that might help adolescents thrive and develop

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the recommendation of the PI's dissertation committee (J. McCarthy, personal communication, June 2, 2017).

healthfully; first, having healthy well-being levels, and next, feeling supported and cared about by adults and peers.

Well-being has been defined in numerous ways in existing literature. Subjective well-being is one type of well-being that is often discussed. People are said to have “abundant” subjective well-being when they experience positive emotions and pleasure, face little pain, and when they are engaged in activities that interest them (Diener, 2000, p. 34). Diener (2000) also called happiness the “colloquial term” for subjective well-being (p. 34).

Another approach to well-being, the eudaimonic approach, focuses less on whether people simply feel pleasure and happiness. Rather, this approach looks at the meaning in people’s lives and whether they are functioning fully (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Carol Ryff’s (1989) definition of well-being is in line with the eudaimonic approach; she argued that to live the best lives possible, people must have psychological well-being. She used the term psychological well-being to encompass six distinct dimensions related to positive functioning (Ryff, 1989, p. 1072; Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 724). Ryff described these six dimensions as “theoretical constructs that point to different aspects of positive functioning” (p. 1072). These six dimensions include self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Ryff (1989) acknowledged that prior to her work on psychological well-being, a number of theories already attempted to explain how and why people were well. However, to Ryff, no single theory addressed what she described as the “core underlying

question: what does it mean to be well psychologically?” (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 719). Therefore, Ryff (1989) combined aspects that she saw as being similar within existing theories; she used these to craft a new definition of psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) also created a Psychological Well-Being Scale in order to “develop structured, self-report instruments that serve as indicators of these [six dimensions of psychological well-being] constructs” (p. 1072).

Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being was used in this study for two primary reasons. First, Keyes (2006) stressed that psychological well-being is connected to adolescents’ mental health. To Keyes (2006), being “mentally healthy” did not mean that one lacked a mental illness; it meant that one “flourished,” or experienced numerous symptoms of emotional, psychological and social well-being “almost every day or every day” (p. 396). Being mentally unhealthy or “languishing” meant rarely experiencing indicators of these same types of well-being (Keyes, 2006, pp. 396).

In other words, Keyes’ (2006) thought of being mentally health as frequently experiencing positive feelings about one’s life and being able to function and navigate through one’s life (p. 395). Keyes (2006) reported that those who flourish during adolescence often have “developmentally desirable outcomes” (p. 401). On the other hand, moderately mentally healthy (Keyes defined this group as “neither flourishing or languishing”), and mentally unhealthy adolescents, often have lower self-esteem, report less closeness with others, and feel less connected to their schools than mentally healthy peers (Keyes, 2006, pp. 396, 398–400).

Next, the six dimensions that Ryff (1989) described as comprising psychological



well-being are all covered in some way by Sole Train's mission and goals (an idea highlighted in more detail in the Theoretical Framework section of this dissertation). Sole Train is a youth development through physical activity group that attempts to build up the "whole" adolescent and help them become a fully functioning person. The program was designed around goals that align with Ryff's (1989) idea that to be well, people must experience self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Research has suggested that groups like Sole Train have the potential to (among other things) help adolescents develop positively and behave in pro-social ways (e.g., Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009; Strunin, Douyon, Chavez, Bunte, & Horsburgh, 2010; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Hellison, 2003; Hellison, 2010; MacDonald, Côté, Eys, & Deakin, 2011; Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011; Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004).

Sole Train's design and mission also set it up to be the type of program that provides a caring climate. Youth development through physical activity groups (like Sole Train) can be most beneficial to young participants when leaders (as well as others involved in the program) intentionally create a caring climate, or a setting perceived by participants to be "interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive and capable of providing the experience of being valued and respected" (Newton, Fry, Watson, Gano-Overway, Kim, Magyar & Guivernau, 2007, p. 67). Sole Train asks adult leaders to be genuinely supportive and caring toward participants, and asks participants to build one another up (Sole Train Logic Model Draft, 2015). Being a part of a caring climate in a sport setting has been linked with positive social behaviors, healthy development, and increased well-

being in young people (Byrd & Martin, 2016; Fry & Gano-Overway, 2013; Gano-Overway, 2013; Gould, Flett & Lauer, 2012; Newton et al., 2007; Reinboth & Duda, 2006).

Sole Train is also meant to provide participants with a social support system. This includes supportive coaches, as healthy coach/athlete relationships have been found to benefit young athletes (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks & Hoeksma, 2007; Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2010; Vella, Oades, & Crow, 2011; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Positive peers are also important parts of Sole Train. Research has found that positive peer relationships impact the lives of young people and their sport experiences (e.g., Allen, 2003; Cox & Ullrich-French, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2011; Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005; Vu, Murrie, Gonzalez, & Jobe, 2006).

### **The Known Benefits of Physical Activity and Running**

Physical activity, in the form of running, is obviously central to what Sole Train does. Research has suggested that regular physical activity is linked to improved physical health (e.g., Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; MacKelvie, Khan, Petit, Janssen & McKay, 2003). Physical activity has also been found to have emotional health benefits for teens (e.g., Brosnahan, Steffen, Lytle, & Boostrom, 2004; Crews, Lochbaum, & Landers, 2004; da Fonesca Magalhaes & Ramos, 2017; Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Field, Miguel, & Sanders, 2001; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Motta, Kuligowski, & Marino,

2010; Nelson & Gordon-Larson, 2006; Parfitt & Eston, 2005; Sagatun, Sogaard, Bjertness, Selmer, & Heyerdahl, 2007; Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007). Similarly, research has also suggested that exercise can be related to increases in well-being (e.g., Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson, & Winefield, 2009).

Running, and participating in running-based youth development programs, may also be related to emotional and physical health benefits for adolescents (e.g., Kalak et al., 2012; Sifers & Shea, 2013). Sole Train, for instance, uses physical activity, in the form of running, to foster youth development. However, running can also be a complex sport for young people to participate in; intense training and competitive running have also been linked to various health and emotional difficulties in teens (e.g., Cobb et al., 2003; Huxley, O'Connor, & Healey, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section of the study reviews Sole Train's goals. It also establishes the links between Sole Train participation and the concepts of promoting well-being and the context of a caring climate. First, it makes sense to study whether Sole Train could be powerful enough to actually make a difference in adolescents' lives (beyond the physical) and change participants for the better, as people, because Sole Train's design contains elements that are conducive to positive youth development (or positive growth and "skill acquisition") generally (Petitpas, Corneilius, & Van Raalte, 2008). According to Petitpas et al. (2008) "positive growth is most likely to occur" when the following things are true about a young person's involvement in a physical activity group:

- Participation is “voluntary” (this is true with Sole Train)
- The activity is “intrinsically rewarding” (this is ideally true of the program)
- The group “contains clear rules and boundaries” (Sole Train has these)
- The group “requires committed effort over time” (Sole Train requires active participation over the course of an academic year)
- Participants are “surrounded by external assets, including a positive community environment with caring adult mentors” (these are key features of Sole Train’s design)
- Group members “learn or acquire internal assets that are important for dealing with various life challenges, have opportunities to gain self-confidence by using these skills in leadership and community service outside of sport” (There are a multitude of opportunities for Sole Train participants to learn within the group; the idea of transferring Sole Train lessons to other areas of life is emphasized by coaches) (Petitpas et al., 2008, pp. 61–62).

**Psychological well-being.** Beyond the broader idea that Sole Train has the capacity to change participants in positive ways, this study specifically examined if Sole Train participants experienced the group as having a caring climate, and if participation was linked to shifts in participants’ psychological well-being. Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being (as was explained in this dissertation’s introduction) is made up of six distinct dimensions (self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy). The first of these

dimensions is self-acceptance. One has self-acceptance when he or she has “a positive evaluation of oneself and one’s past life” (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 720). The second dimension Ryff (1989) described was personal growth. Personal growth is, “a sense of continued...development as a person,” while purpose in life (the third dimension) is, “the belief that one’s life is ...meaningful” (or worthwhile) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 720).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) stated that having positive relations with others (the next dimension) involves possessing “quality” relationships (or connections) with the people in one’s life, and that environmental mastery (the fifth dimension Ryff listed as comprising psychological well-being) means that one “manages effectively one’s life and surrounding world” (p. 720). Finally, autonomy, as the final of the six dimensions, means that one experiences “a sense of self-determination” (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 720).

Various theories have tried to explain and understand the levers for promoting well-being. For instance, some scholars in the field of Positive Psychology, such as Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006), have posited that activities people choose to partake in are most influential in terms of impacting their well-being. Similarly, Ryff (1989) suggested that looking to individuals’ “life experiences and opportunities” might provide a “promising avenue for explanatory research” on why psychological well-being varies among people, and how it might be altered (and ideally increased) (Ryff, 1989, p. 1079).

Ruini et al. (2009) highlighted the importance of evaluating the psychological well-being of adolescents. Measuring psychological well-being in adolescents, and using Ryff’s tool to do so makes sense, “because [young people] possessing high levels in the

six dimensions [of psychological well-being] represent important steps to be achieved during an optimal developmental process” (Ruini et al., 2009, p. 523).

One type of therapy, well-being therapy (or WBT), is a targeted “psychotherapeutic strategy” meant to “improve levels of psychological well-being according to these [Ryff’s] dimensions, using cognitive-behavioral techniques” (Fava & Ruini, 2003, p. 45). The techniques used as a part of WBT are meant to be positive, and to enhance patients’ psychological well-being, as opposed to only treating their “psychological distress” (Fava & Ruini, 2003, pp. 48–49, 54). Fava and Ruini (2003) suggested that WBT can have positive implications for patients with clinical issues. Ruini et al. (2009) also found that an in-school intervention using WBT-based techniques could increase well-being levels in adolescents without clinical issues.

Sole Train does not specifically feature WBT techniques (and was not specifically designed around Ryff’s (1989) definition of well-being). However, it is appropriate to look at Sole Train in connection to this psychological well-being definition, as opposed to other well-being definitions. First, Ryff (1989) looked at well-being as a larger concept (psychological well-being) made up of various individual dimensions (self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy). Similarly, Sole Train has one overarching mission (to help youth realize their potential), but acknowledges that this can only happen if they focus on building up a number of assets within participants.

It makes sense to think about Sole Train in relation to Ryff’s (1989) definition because the program is driven by goals that align with the six dimensions of

psychological well-being (see Table 2 for information on the relationships between Sole Train's goals and the various dimensions of psychological-well being). Sole Train's strategic program goals are broken down into three categories: initial, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for participants. Table 1 presents the program's goals.

**Table 1: Sole Train’s Strategic Program Goals (Sole Train Logic Model Draft, 2015)**

<i>Initial Outcomes</i> <i>*Skills, knowledge, attitudes, values</i>	<i>Intermediate Outcomes</i> <i>*Change in behavior</i>	<i>Long-term Outcomes</i>
<p>Participants are to “develop a sense of increased possibility in all 3” of the following “buckets”</p> <p><u>Self-efficacy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students follow through on initial commitment made to Sole Train</li> <li>- Students learn to break down [a] challenging race goal into manageable steps and to pace themselves in order to reach running goal</li> <li>- Students increase self-worth</li> <li>- Students develop the grit they need to achieve Sole Train goals</li> </ul> <p><u>Character / (GIVE: gratitude, integrity, influence, intentionality, vision, enthusiasm):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students increase gratitude, integrity, influence, intentionality, vision, enthusiasm</li> <li>- Students develop leadership competence</li> </ul> <p><u>Community connectedness:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students increasingly understand the benefits of and begin to contribute to and receive from Sole Train community (Students affirm and celebrate peers in the Sole Train community)</li> </ul>	<p>Students commit to increasingly higher level goals</p> <p><u>Self-efficacy:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Upon achieving running goals, students realize they can achieve other seemingly-impossible healthy goals that are important to them (mind is blown)</li> <li>- Students have self-worth</li> </ul> <p><u>Character / (GIVE):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students demonstrate gratitude, integrity, influence, intentionality, vision, enthusiasm</li> </ul> <p><u>Community connectedness:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students actively and consistently contribute to and receive from Sole Train community</li> <li>- Students identify and commit to become a contributing member of a safe, supportive community (either Sole Train or other)</li> <li>- Students identify positive social supports (community and/or individuals) needed to achieve personal goals</li> </ul>	<p>Students engage in and serve as leaders in a safe, supportive community that inspires them to dream big, take risks, and actively work towards setting and achieving goals that previously seemed challenging or impossible.</p>



Given these logic model outcomes it is clear that Sole Train is attempting to use the positive parts of running and lessons about personal development to impact various aspects of adolescents' self-views, self-confidence levels, and how they relate to others and the world. Therefore, this study was designed to capture whether adolescents who participated in Sole Train discussed experiencing any perceived shifts in self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy levels either during or after being involved with the group. Additionally, the study also examined whether adults involved with Sole Train witnessed or perceived any such shifts in participants.

**Table 2: Sole Train's Goals and the Six Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being**

<i>Portions of Sole Train's (ST) goals</i>	<i>Psychological well-being dimensions (Ryff, 1989)</i>	<i>Rationale for linking goals and dimensions</i>
- Increase self-worth (Ino)	Self-acceptance: "A positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges/accepts... aspects of self, including good/bad qualities (p. 1072).	ST tries to cultivate "positive attitude toward the self;" helps YSs feel worthy, confident, capable.
- Have self-worth (Into)		
- Increase gratitude, integrity...intentionality, vision, enthusiasm (Ino)	Personal Growth: "A feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time... (p. 1072).	ST tries to help YSs develop positive attributes, push beyond their comfort levels toward growth. ST wants YSs to "dream big;" helping YSs build the strength, life skills, and character needed to achieve dreams.
- Demonstrate gratitude, integrity...enthusiasm (Into)		
- Dream big (Lo)		
- Actively work towards setting/achieving goals that once seemed impossible (Lo)	Purpose in Life: Having "goals in life and a sense of directedness" and "aims and objectives for living" (p. 1072).	ST stresses the importance of setting/achieving goals; aims to help participants work to reach these.
- Understand the benefits of, give/receive from ST (Ino)	Positive relations with others: One "has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships" (p. 1072).	ST asks YSs to be active, positive community members who both give and receive support. ST also aims to have YSs form close connections with people who will help them be their best selves.
- Consistently give/receive from ST (Into)		
- Be a contributing member of a safe...community (Into)		
- Identify positive social supports (Into)		
- Engage/grow in a safe... community (Lo)		
- Learn to break down challenging race goal into manageable steps/pace themselves to reach running goal (Ino)	Environmental mastery: "Mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities..." (p. 1072).	ST prepares YSs to ideally take part in a large, potentially overwhelming race. ST aims to equip participants with the tools necessary to navigate new, complex and seemingly challenging situations.

- Develop leadership competency (Into)	Autonomy: “Self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think/act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards” (p. 1072).	ST tries to help YSs think for themselves, motivate and challenge themselves, and have the confidence/character to lead others.
- Engage in and serve as leaders; take risks (Lo)		

*Note:* Sole Train abbreviated as “ST,” Young Soles as “YSs,” Initial outcomes as “Ino,” Intermediate outcomes as “Into,” and Long-term outcomes as “Lo”

**Caring climate.** In addition to Sole Train’s goals, another key piece of the program is the people involved. The adult coaches and the teams of adolescents that they lead are the ones who really decide whether the program’s goals are carried out in a way that could be beneficial to participants. According to Newton et al. (2007), adults, in particular, play a pivotal role in what (if anything) participants end up taking away from their experiences in youth development groups, particularly those involving physical activity.

Developmental, personal, and behavioral shifts can occur in young people when the adults in youth development through physical activity settings work to make them feel cared about, safe, and respected. Specifically, when youth are part of such supportive climates, this can result in them having more positive feelings about their sport (and ideally participating in sport or in physical activity in their futures) (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010). Involvement in caring groups can also lead to participants demonstrating pro-social, caring and empathetic behaviors and having increased senses of well-being (Gano-Overway, 2013; Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010; Fry, Guivernau, Kim, Newton, Gano-Overway & Magyar, 2012; Reinboth & Duda, 2006).

Therefore, this study examined the type of climates that adult coaches strived to create within their Sole Train groups and how adolescent participants perceived these. Specifically, the study looked at whether Sole Train's adults created the types of caring climates that could result in youth experiencing the afore mentioned developmental benefits. Newton et al. (2007) defined caring climates as those climates that are perceived by participants as being "interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive," and those that allow them to feel "valued and respected" within their groups (p. 67).

Additionally, psychological well-being and caring climate must not only be thought of separately in terms of youth development through physical activity programs. Rather, these two concepts can connect. Fry, Guivernau, Kim, Newton, Gano-Overway and Magyar (2012) found that when youth perceived a physical activity group to have a caring climate they became more likely to open up, take chances, and in turn, to experience more positive emotion and well-being. In that study, the researchers did not use Ryff's (1989) definition of well-being; rather they looked at whether a caring climate could influence things like participants' hope and happiness levels (Fry et al., 2012). Looking at both the concepts at well-being and caring climate in this study makes sense, though, as in some groups these things may be related (Fry et al., 2012).

### **Specific Research Questions**

At its core Sole Train is meant to serve Boston's vulnerable adolescent population; groups like Sole Train can be places that can benefit and support young people and aid in their positive development. In order to do this, such groups need to

offer “intentional” programming to really aid the population they are trying to serve (Newton et al., 2007). Youth development oriented groups that are particularly beneficial provide the following: “strong instructor-participant relationships,” tools that allow for youth “self-reflection,” and consideration of things like “self-motivation, goal-setting and respect for others” (Hellison et al., 2010, pp. 51–52).

Groups trying to effectively serve adolescents must also work to help them transfer life skills, lessons and responsibilities learned to realms “outside of the physical activity” (Hellison et al., 2010, pp. 51–52). Therefore, questions about whether this is happening, and what Sole Train actually *does* for those involved, were examined in this study. The following research questions were designed to provide insight into the thoughts, experiences, and “take-aways” of some adult coaches and adolescent participants involved in Sole Train during 2015–2016 programming. These questions were also crafted to pay special attention to the concepts of psychological well-being and caring climate and how these connect to Sole Train.

**Primary research question.** Research Question #1: How did Sole Train coaches and participants perceive their experiences with the program?

**Secondary questions.** Research Question #2: Did Sole Train coaches try to create a caring climate and did Sole Train participants experience the climate of Sole Train as caring?

Research Question #3: Did Sole Train participants describe their Sole Train participation as impacting their psychological well-being? Did Sole Train coaches describe witnessing any changes in participants’ psychological well-being?

## **Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature**

This review presents literature intended to help the reader understand the significance of each of the major concepts examined in this study (psychological well-being and caring climate). The review also features research that explored the concepts of psychological well-being and caring climate in relation to adolescents. This compilation of literature also provides examples of studies that highlight the potential that youth development groups — particularly youth development groups that incorporate physical activity (like Sole Train) — have to impact the lives of young people.

Finally, Sole Train is a multi-faceted program. It is running focused, but also includes a strong emphasis on the relationships between supportive adults and participants, and on how young participants build one another up. Hence, this literature review presents the reader with literature that points to how these elements (which are included in Sole Train) may influence the development and well-being of adolescents, as well.

### **Well-being and Adolescents' Well-being**

As was mentioned in the introduction of this study, there are various definitions of well-being. Subjective well-being is based on well-being being connected to “overall life satisfaction and happiness” (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002, p. 1008). Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being is focused on optimal functioning and how successfully individuals deal with the “challenges of life” (such as “seeing the good in

themselves” and being able to “develop and maintain warm and trusting interpersonal relationships” and more) (Keyes et al., 2002, p. 1008).

Keyes et al. (2002) described subjective well-being as “happiness,” while psychological well-being was equated with “psychological thriving” (p. 1019). Keyes et al., (2002) conducted research with a group of adults and found that subjective well-being and psychological well-being are related, but that they are in, fact, separate things, with subjective well-being being more focused on being happy and feeling good, and psychological well-being being more linked to things like “growth” and “purpose” (p. 1017). These authors also found that individuals with higher levels of psychological well-being than subjective well-being were more open to experiences, or more “creative, imaginative, curious, broadminded, sophisticated, and adventurous” (Keyes et al., 2002, pp. 1011, 1019).

When Ryff (1989) originally developed her definition of psychological well-being (and the scale associated with this) she was primarily focused on the well-being of adults (as was the Keyes et al. (2002) study that examined the relationship between subjective and psychological well-being). In fact, Ryff’s definition and scale is still most often used in studies with adults. Ryff re-examined her original (1989) definition of psychological well-being in a 2013 article. In that 2013 piece she explained that her definition of well-being and her subsequent scale (which measures the six dimensions that she considers paramount to psychological well-being) are most often used in research involving adults and the elderly. She explained that this tends to be the case because older individuals can reflect in a unique way on the six dimensions, particularly purpose in life and personal

growth; older people can think differently about those specific dimensions as they have gone through adulthood, dealt with adult issues, and have transitioned from one phase of life to the next (Ryff, 2013).

However, this is not to definitively say that her definition should not be used with adolescents. A small number of studies have used some version of Ryff's scale with adolescents (Ruini et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2009). Fernandes et al. (2010) conducted studies with 10 to 18 year olds to see if Ryff's psychological well-being scale was appropriate for use in research involving the well-being of adolescents. The authors found that a shortened version of Ryff's psychological well-being scale (containing 30 items) worked well with an adolescent population (Fernandes et al., 2010, p. 1041).

According to those authors, the shortened version displayed "satisfactory indexes for internal consistency and a good fit to the data, supporting the multidimensional, six-factor premise suggested by Carol Ryff" (Fernandes et al., 2010, p. 1041). Regardless of the definition or scale used, because of the challenges that face adolescents — particularly those adolescents that deal with serious risks — it is imperative to understand what well-being means for people in this age bracket and how it may be impacted. Numerous studies have focused on which aspects of young people's lives might have an influence over well-being — both those things that might stand in the way of adolescents being well, and those things that might enhance their well-being. For instance, Ryff and Heidrich (1997) found that the psychological well-being levels of young adults (around age 19) "were strongly predicted by...life activities" that occurred "outside of work or school" (p. 203).



Bolland (2003) highlighted just a few of the issues that keep at-risk adolescents from being well, and developing optimally. According to Bolland (2003), adolescents facing serious risks often experience high levels of hopelessness. In that study, Bolland (2003) determined which adolescents were hopeless based on whether they agreed with negative statements like “all I see in front of me are bad things, not good things” and “I may as well give up because I can’t make things better for myself” (p. 149).

Negative statements like those express ideas that are opposed to Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being. In particular, agreeing with such statements would imply that one does not believe in their capacity to grow personally, or that there is a purpose to their lives. Additionally, compared to more hopeful peers, hopeless at-risk young people tended to act out violently, engage in dangerous sexual behaviors, use substances, and were more likely to become injured accidentally (Bolland, 2003).

While many things could keep young people from experiencing optimal well-being, a number of variables have been found to positively relate to young people’s well-being, too. For instance, psychological well-being connects to self-esteem (or having a positive view of one’s self, as opposed to feeling positively about just aspects of one’s self or one’s life) (Ryff, 2013). One study, which used Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being, found that people with higher self-esteem were more likely to have higher levels of psychological well-being than those with low self-esteem (Paradise & Kernis, 2002).

According to one study, when adolescents reported high levels of self-esteem they tended to feel happier and less lonely than adolescents with low self-esteem (Cheng &

Furnham, 2002). For adolescents that could be considered at-risk, low-levels of self-esteem can be particularly meaningful in terms of the decisions that they make and whether their lives progress down positive or negative paths (Barry, Grafeman, Adler, & Prickard, 2007). One study found that “when controlling for narcissism” (which was taken into account in this piece) having low self-esteem was linked to at-risk youth exhibiting delinquent behaviors (such as illegal or aggressive acts) (Barry et al., 2007, p. 933).

Other internal and external factors influence adolescents’ well-being, too. These include “individual, friend, and school variables” (Morgan, Vera, Gonzales, Conner, Bena Vacek, & Dick Coyle, 2009, p. 18). Feeling meaningfully connected to things like family, peers and their community can also have positive implications for adolescents’ well-being; this is true not just in the short term, but over time, as well (Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012).

Another study conducted with 11 to 19 years olds found that positive relationships with parents and peers enhanced subjects’ psychological well-being (Corsano, Majorano, & Champretavy, 2006). This study found that in order for parental and peer relationships to really influence psychological well-being, subjects had to feel authentically accepted by their peers and genuinely supported by parents (Corsano et al., 2006). In addition to relationships impacting well-being, Ben-Zur (2001) also suggested that connections exist between adolescents’ well-being and whether they experience feelings of “perceived mastery” (or control over their actions) and whether they have optimistic outlooks (pp. 68, 76).

Similarly, McCullough, Huebner and Laughlin (2000) indicated that both major and minor life events might also influence adolescents' well-being (p. 287). Trainor et al. (2009) suggested that individual personalities and "dispositional factors" might also play a major role in adolescents' psychological well-being (Trainor et al., 2009, p. 180). Ruini et al. (2009) also posited that it is not just adolescents' thoughts, behaviors, support systems or circumstances that can alter well-being, but that activities that adolescents take part in can have an impact, too. In their study, an in-school intervention designed to promote psychological well-being, and decrease anxiety, did so among adolescent participants (Ruini et al., 2009).

### **Physical Activity and Well-Being**

**Physical activity and physical health.** Fox, Boutcher, Faulkner and Biddle (2000) defined physical activity as "an umbrella term describing any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles resulting in energy expenditure" (p. 8). However, exercise does not only involve the physical body, it has often been described as an activity that can impact the mind and emotions, too. It seems almost counterintuitive that an action that some perceive as difficult, like running or exercising, could possibly promote well-being. However, the Mayo Clinic's website (2017) touched upon why exercise can promote good feelings in people on a purely physical level. The Mayo Clinic's site explained that physical exertion "helps bump up the brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins" ("Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress," 2015).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (or CDC) emphasized the necessity of exercising for physical health; they listed improved strength and endurance, weight control, and the improvement of blood pressure and cholesterol levels among the benefits of regular physical activity (meaning about 60 minutes of physical activity a day) (“Physical activity facts,” 2015). Regular physical activity is imperative to good physical health in people of all ages; children and adolescents are no exception.

One review of research related to the physical health benefits of regular exercise in “school-aged” children found a number of things. First, the research review showed that even a small amount of exercise could improve things like cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, and bone density in young people (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Similarly, one study found increases in bone density among adolescent females when they took part in high impact exercises three times per week over a two-year span (MacKelvie et al., 2003).

Health and exercise related research has also suggested that for sedentary and obese young people, partaking in even low levels of physical activity could benefit their health (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Because of the positive implications of regular exercise, the authors provided recommendations about exercise for young people that were similar to those shared by the CDC; they should engage in at least 30 minutes of (preferably vigorous) exercise a day, but 60 minutes would be more beneficial to health (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010).

**Physical activity and mental health (generally).** Fox (2001) explained things that happen in the “physical domain” (or exercise/physical activity experiences) influence

not just physical health, but also aspects of mental health and behavior (p. 94). Among other things, physical activity provides people with opportunities to accept (or not) their strengths and weaknesses, to experience self-determination and personal control, and to consider their physical selves; all of these things can influence self-esteem (Fox, 2001, p. 94). In fact, Fox, Boutcher, Faulkner and Biddle (2000) emphasized that regular exercise can be beneficial to both people with diagnosed mental conditions or those simply dealing with the stressors of life.

According to these authors, exercise costs less and is more easily accessible than traditional therapies (like cognitive-behavioral therapies). Additionally, exercise has “negligible deleterious side-effects,” and once people have learned the basics of exercise they can carry it out on their own whenever it serves them (Fox et al., 2000, p. 4). Fox et al. (2000) also compiled research focused on the relationships between physical activity and anxiety, depression, mood and emotion, self-esteem, cognitive functioning, and psychological dysfunction to highlight the link between physical activity and psychological well-being.

**Physical activity and adult mental health and well-being.** Some studies have looked at the relationship between physical activity, mental health, and general well-being in adults. One study found that adults (between the ages of 25 and 64) who exercised at least two to three times per week were less angry, less depressed and more trusting than those who rarely (or never) exercised (Hassmen, Koivula, & Uutela, 2000). Those who were consistently active also felt better about themselves; they also held more positive views about health and fitness levels than non-exercisers (Hassmen et al., 2000).

Regular exercisers also reportedly felt more connected to others than less active adults (or more “integrated” into the groups, like families, neighborhoods, etc., in their lives) (Hassmen et al., 2000, p. 19).

Edwards et al. (2005) explored psychological well-being in a group of adult exercisers. The authors used a version of Ryff’s (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale to assess the psychological well-being of non-competitive adult runners (as well as that of non-exercisers and of different types of athletes). Compared to non-exercisers, runners scored “significantly higher” in regards to their levels of autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance (as well as on sport competence, conditioning, sport importance, and conditioning importance) (Edwards, et al., 2005, p. 82).

**Physical activity and adolescent mental health and well-being.** While Edwards et al. (2005) did use Ryff’s well-being definition in a physical activity based study, less research exists that looks at potential relationships between Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being and physical activity in adolescents. Exploring connections between physical activity and well-being and mental health is important, though. Just as with adults, regularly exercising can decrease stress and anxiety and increase well-being in adolescents (“Physical activity facts,” 2015). Janssen and LeBlanc (2010) also suggested that regular exercise can reduce depressive symptoms in adolescents.

In terms of psychological well-being, Trainor et al. (2009) pointed to a link between physical activity and psychological well-being in adolescents. Among other

things, their study indicated that adolescents who take part in “structured leisure activities,” including sports, and those who are more physically active in their free time, had higher levels of psychological well-being than other adolescents (Trainor et al., 2009, pp. 175, 181). Smith et al. (2007) also found that not just physical activity, but choices and achievements related to physical activity, can be meaningful to adolescents. When young athletes achieved sport-related goals that were in line with their values and desires, they experienced greater psychological well-being (suggesting a link between physical activity, goal achievement, and psychological well-being) (Smith et al., 2007). The authors in that study suggested that coaches be trained to help athletes set and work toward goals that feel meaningful to them (Smith et al., 2007, p. 778).

Other aspects of adolescents’ mental health, beyond the idea of well-being, can be impacted by taking part in sport and physical activity. Motta et al. (2010) found that when adolescents engaged in regular physical activity and less screen time (a term often used to describe watching television or looking at phones or computers) they dealt with fewer depressive symptoms. Conversely, adolescents who frequently engaged in sedentary leisure activities (including screen time), and rarely took part in physical activities, experienced more symptoms of depression (Sund, Larsson, & Wichstrøm, 2011). Nelson and Gordon-Larson (2006) found that teens that took part in sports activities, and physical activities in general, felt better about themselves than less active peers.

Fredricks and Eccles (2005) reported that high school students who took part in athletic extracurricular activities (as opposed to after school offerings such as clubs

focused on academics, performing arts, or school involvement) experienced specific developmental benefits. Those involved in athletics experienced stronger senses of “school belonging” and “more favorable attitudes toward school” (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, p. 511). High school students involved in athletic endeavors were also found to have “a marginally higher percentage of pro-social peers than non-athletes” and lower rates of depression than peers who did not play sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, p. 511).

Similarly, high school seniors who regularly exercised experienced less depression than peers who rarely exercised (Field et al., 2001). Those who were frequently physically active also reported having better relationships with their parents, increased involvement in sports, less frequent drug use, and higher grade point averages than other high school students who were not often physically active (Field et al., 2001).

Another study conducted with early adolescents (between the ages of 11 and 13 years old) found that participation in formal sports was linked to fewer emotional and behavioral problems (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). Additionally, young adolescents who were involved in physical activities (both formal sports and informal exercise) had higher levels of confidence, and specifically had more positive perceptions of their “athletic competence, social competence and global self-worth” than inactive peers (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006, p. 382). These authors suggested that, in part, exercise decreases the likelihood that adolescents will engage in antisocial behaviors that could put their well-being in danger because physical activity allows a release of aggression (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006, p. 384). Exercise also provides young people with a way to channel energy and emotions in a positive, acceptable way (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006, p. 384).



Other research found that males and females between the ages of 15–16 who spent five to seven hours per week on a physical activity (defined as exercise that left them sweaty or out of breath) experienced less difficulties and negative emotional issues than other teens (Sagatun et al., 2007). For the males involved in Sagatun et al.'s (2007) study, the number of hours spent on physical activity per week at ages 15 and 16 was also negatively associated with emotional difficulties and challenges with friends at ages 18 and 19. Therefore, the study found that physical activity as a teen could have emotional and social benefits later in life (Sagatun et al., 2007).

Parfitt and Eston (2005) also found that regular physical activity could be linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem in young adolescents. Similarly, young people between the ages of 14 to 18 experienced less sadness when they frequently participated in physical education sessions (Brosnahan et al., 2004). According to Brosnahan et al. (2004), “participation in more total physical activity sessions per week was associated with a lower risk of considering or planning suicide,” as well (p. 818).

One noteworthy aspect of regular physical activity during adolescence (particularly early adolescence) is that it may result in individuals being more physically active throughout their lives. One study found that for both boys and girls, taking part in athletic activities in the early adolescent years (specifically age 13 in this case) was linked to continued physical activity throughout adolescence (specifically through age 17) (da Fonesca Magalhaes & Ramos, 2017). Since regular physical activity is suggested for people of all ages (so that they can reap exercise's physical and mental benefits),

increasing the likelihood that adolescents will regularly integrate exercise into their lives could help set them up for long-term health (da Fonesca Magalhaes & Ramos, 2017).

Crews et al. (2004) stressed that not only are most adolescents mentally and emotionally vulnerable, but that young people from low-income homes and areas are “at greater risk than the general population for experiencing high environmental stress and increased mental health problems” (p. 319). This study found that a “structured physical fitness program” had positive impacts on the on psychological well-being of “low-income Hispanic children” (Crews et al., 2004, p. 319). Specifically, taking part in structured, regular aerobic exercise resulted in young people reporting more self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Crews et al., 2004).

Despite the research that supports the need for all people, but particularly adolescents and socially vulnerable youth, to be physically active, many people still do not get the recommended amount of physical activity on a regular basis. Members of “underserved” urban communities, too, are more at risk for diseases related to inactivity and obesity, including diabetes and hypertension; these individuals often lack access to safe places to engage in physical activity (and are often deterred by other factors, too) (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 9). Thus, research points to the need to make physical activity opportunities as accessible as possible, particularly to young people in urban areas, so that they are able to engage in — and ideally benefit from — physical activity (both during adolescence and throughout their lives).

## **Running and Adolescents**

Although the previous section points to the fact that extensive research exists on the relationships between adolescents' mental health and physical activity, less research can be found about the physical act of running as a youth or teen and being emotionally or psychologically well. A number of studies do examine at the connections between adolescent running and physical health — both the positive and negative implications that this sport can have for teens. In terms of physical health, Janssen and LeBlanc (2010) suggested that aerobic activities (like running) could be among the most beneficial activities for young people's physical health (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Kalak et al. (2012) also presented both the physical and psychological benefits that just 30 minutes of daily morning running could have for adolescents. Compared to a control group, participants who ran each morning for three weeks experienced improvements in their sleep, as well as their psychological functioning (Kalak et al., 2012).

Greene and Pate (2015) discussed young people and distance running, with a particular focus on whether it is healthy for young people to run long distances. The authors posited that while young people may be capable of training for and running long distances, even marathons, distance training before becoming physically mature may cause injury, may interfere with physical development, and may lead to young people becoming emotionally burned out (in terms of running) (Greene & Pate, 2015). Because of these risks, the authors advise that young people wait to begin intense running until they are at least in the early stages of puberty or around the ages of 11–13 (Greene & Pate, 2015).

Studies have specifically examined the link between adolescents running and injuries, including stress fractures (e.g., Tenforde, Sayres, McCurdy, Sainani, & Fredricson, 2013; Rauh, Barrack, & Nichols, 2014; Huxley et al., 2014). In fact, because of the prevalence of running injuries, Huxley et al. (2014) recommended that coaches remain aware of (and limit) the amount of intense training done by elite and competitive teen runners. Other research has looked at adolescent running and the influences it can have on eating habits, menstrual disturbances in females, and bone health (e.g. Barrack, Van Loan, Rauh, & Nichols, 2010). The female athlete triad can be problematic for young runners; this is when “disordered eating, menstrual irregularity, and osteoporosis/osteopenia” occurs in “young female athletes” (Cobb et al., 2003, p. 711). One study with a similar focus explored the physical impacts of adolescent running and suggested that female adolescent endurance runners may actually be at risk for having lower bone mass than other young people (Barrack, Rauh, & Nichols, 2008).

A number of studies have also looked at the health implications of running along with other aerobic activities or other “lean-sports.” Two such studies suggested that adolescent participants in “lean-sports” may face challenges in terms of healthy eating: Barrack, Rauh, and Nichols (2008) suggested that adolescent female distance runners may not be getting adequate amounts of important nutrients, while Reinking and Alexander (2005) suggested that athletes who participate in sports where maintaining a low weight may be a focus are more likely to deal with disordered eating habits.

This is not to say that all running is bad or dangerous for young people. Greene and Pate (2015) said that running, when done in appropriate amounts and at the right

point in life, can be both fun and healthy for young people. The authors raised no concerns about children and youth taking part in short fun runs, and suggested that when young people are physically ready they can safely partake in more serious training (Greene & Pate, 2015). Additionally, running-based youth development groups — which may not emphasize that participants maintain a low weight, and may not stress the competitive parts of running or training as intensely as some elite running programs, or some track or cross country programs that focused on the sport alone — have often reported witnessing positive outcomes for participants.

For instance, the leaders of Sole Train are clear that their running-based youth development program is not about competition. Author Kelly McGonigal (2015) actually wrote about Sole Train, and the positive work she observed the group doing, as part of her work on stress<sup>2</sup>. In McGonigal's (2015) writing she emphasized that Sole Train is not meant to be competitive; she quoted the Director of Sole Train as saying, "If you want to be competitive with yourself, that's great, have goals...but never against someone else" (p. 2 of chapter entitled "A Hand on Your Back").

McGonigal (2015) also described her experience observing as Sole Train runners took part in a five-mile race (McGonigal, 2015). She witnessed some of the positive behaviors that accompany running with this particular running-based youth development group. For instance, she saw Sole Train participants act in supportive ways toward one

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<sup>2</sup> The Director of Sole Train shared McGonigal's (2015) piece on Sole Train with the PI on 03/07/16. The PI reviewed that writing, but revisited it during the final stages of her own writing on this study and its findings. Upon revisiting the piece, the PI recognized that she and McGonigal shared, at times, similar observations about Sole Train's mission, participants, and adult leaders. The PI discussed this with her academic advisor and made every effort to note any similarities between McGonigal's thoughts and those of the PI in this dissertation.

another; they did things like embrace and high-five before their run (McGonigal, 2015). She also saw those who finished with faster times act in encouraging, rather than competitive ways; she saw the faster young runners return to the race course to run with those who had not yet finished (McGonigal, 2015).

According to an excerpt from her book, she listened as the Sole Train runners communicated openly, speaking about what they wanted to give and get from others during a pre-race opening circle, and how they felt about their races during a closing “circle of appreciation” (McGonigal, 2015, p. 3 of chapter entitled “A Hand on Your Back”). As part of her observation of Sole Train participants, the author noted that “they appeared to embrace the community-building rituals [of Sole Train] whole heartedly,” and that it was evident to her that they possessed “leadership, kindness, and self-discipline” (McGonigal, 2015, p. 4 of chapter entitled “A Hand on Your Back”).

One article profiled (and highlighted the positive aspects of) a non-competitive running group for young people in a rural area of the United States, which, despite the fact that it took place in a rural versus an urban area, was designed to operate much like Sole Train (Bories & Buwick, 2013). Both the running group featured in that piece and Sole Train encourage young people with a variety of physical activity backgrounds and skill levels to join, and in both groups participants are expected to never judge one another (Bories & Buwick, 2013). Additionally, both programs aim to help participants develop leadership skills (Bories & Buwick, 2013). According to Bories and Buwick (2013), the rural running group featured in their piece, like Sole Train, worked to improve [participants’] physical and psychological well-being through running, and

emphasized that what was learned through the group “has the ability to carry over into other aspects of life” (p. 69).

According to the website of another running-based youth development group, Students Run L.A., participants who have taken part in their group, which trains young runners to complete a marathon while learning lessons about character, goal setting, and connection with others, have benefited. Participants have finished their program with positive views of school, confidence in their ability to reach goals, stronger coping skills, and clearer visions of positive futures (“Our Impact,” 2017). Another distance running program for high school students in the Boston area, Dreamfar High School Marathon, also aims to help teens develop “physically, socially, emotionally,” while training them to complete a marathon (“Mission Statement,” 2017). One article on the Dreamfar program indicated that despite differing backgrounds, participants formed strong connections with others in the group and learned to set both running and life goals (Megliola, 2011).

A study was also conducted on the impacts of another running-based youth development program, Girls on the Run (Sifers & Shea, 2013). That program trains girls to run a 5K race and also incorporates life lessons and messages about character development and avoiding risky behaviors. Sifers and Shea (2013) suggested that participation in this program could be linked to “improvement in self-perception specific to global self-worth physical appearance, and social acceptance” (p. 83). While this piece indicated that participants experienced some emotional benefits, participants did not report improvements in “self-perception or in behavioral and emotional functioning” (Sifers & Shea, 2013, p. 83).

The study on Girls on the Run, and the other available information on running-based youth development programs, has suggested that participants often experience some positive outcomes from these types of groups. However, none of the pieces that the PI found went into detail about whether any changes within participants were attributed to general program participation or the physical act of running. Megliola's (2011) article does feature a quote from the creator of Dreamfar about the fact that when young people run a new distance, and realize they are actually able to run it, this keeps them coming back and wanting to improve. Bories and Buwick (2013) also brought up the idea that running can have unique benefits for young people. To the authors, running is about personal achievement, effort, and improvement. These authors said, about the actual activity of running,

Running is the perfect medium to increase cardiovascular fitness because the goals are easy to measure; it takes little coordination, and does not require a great deal of equipment. The program emphasizes running as an enjoyable activity that may continue to be an important component of a lifetime commitment to physical activity engagement and overall fitness (Bories & Buwick, 2013, p. 67).

### **Youth Development Through Physical Activity Programs**

The previous portion of this literature review highlighted the potential physical, mental and psychological benefits of exercise, as well as the literature (and the lack of literature) about running and its impacts on young people. However, research does



clearly indicate that physical activity can also act as a vehicle through which life skills, including lessons about personal and social responsibility and pro-social behaviors, are taught to young people (Hellison, 2003; Hellison, 2010). In fact, because sport and physical activity can positively impact the emotions and the subsequent actions of children and teens, these things have become a central part of many programs, such as Sole Train, that are designed to promote healthy youth development (Nicholson et al., 2004).

Many types of youth development groups exist, both those that incorporate a sport or physical activity component, and those that use other approaches to help people grow and develop skills. Some groups can help youth deal with present day challenges, while some can help youth consider who they might be in the future. Walsh (2008) conducted research on whether participation in a “career club” that used the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model (or TPSR), and involved seventh and eighth graders from an urban area, could influence subjects’ thinking about their futures (p. 209). The results indicated that through coaching and reflection, participants were able to have better senses of their futures (particularly in terms of future careers) and who they might become (Walsh, 2008).

Nicholson et al. (2004) explained, however, that all effective youth development programs (regardless of the main activity for attendees) should have “safe and supportive” environments; they should also empower participants to “develop an identity and confront the tough issues and extraordinary pressures of growing up” (p. 55). Similarly, Hirsch (2011) stated that the “mission” of youth development programs should

be to “help young people cope with stressors, and develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will help them to grow toward positive adulthoods” (p. 68). Developing life skills through such groups is also important. These life skills are defined by Theokas et al. (2010) as “those skills that enable individuals to succeed in different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods and with peer groups” (p. 72).

Both Nicholson et al. (2004) and Hellison (2003) stressed that youth development programs that include physical activity are appropriate settings for youth to learn life lessons and skills or to be positively impacted in other ways. According to Nicholson et al. (2004) these types of programs involve participants engaging in teamwork, healthy competition, and exercising “self-control and discipline,” and “sports and athletic programs that are carefully designed and implemented by well-trained adults can foster physical, social, and emotional development” (p. 63).

Hellison (2003) stated that physical activity groups “involve action, interaction, and a range of emotional states” (p. 243). Additionally, Hellison explained that “kids” bring all “aspects of themselves into the gym [or physical activity setting]” (including the emotional, cognitive, and physical parts of themselves) (Hellison, 2010, p. 11). Thus, because the “whole [young] person” shows up to sport/exercise programs, these programs offer “unique personal and social development opportunities” for participants, that schools, or other organizations that focus on only one part of young people’s lives, may not (Hellison, 2010, p. 11; Hellison, 2003, p. 243).

Hellison, Martinek, Walsh and Holt (2010) also described how physical activity

settings have the potential to help adolescents, particularly at-risk youth or those who live in underserved communities, develop specific life skills, such as leadership. According to these authors, the young people that are often chosen by school and community organizations to be leaders are typically those who are “popular in mainstream peer groups” (Hellison et al., 2010, p. 53). Therefore, physical activity groups that are available to youth in underserved communities, or to youth who do not fall into “mainstream peer groups,” are places that might allow these young people to learn about themselves, gain confidence, and even try to act as leaders.

Bruening et al. (2009) found an after school youth development through physical activity program where pre-adolescents were lead through physical activities and life skills lessons to be beneficial. Among other things, participants gained “self-esteem/self-worth,” increased “accountability or responsibility for self,” strengthened “connections to community,” and acquired “life and health skills” (Bruening et al., 2009, p. 92).

Additionally, a youth development program involving female adolescents from an urban area engaging in physical activity and health education sessions resulted in participants learning about “personal health,” and experiencing “increased self-confidence in decision making” (Strunin et al., 2010, p. 3).

A study published in the 2011 *Sport Psychologist* journal suggested that teams like Sole Train, which focus on both individuals achieving lofty personal goals and feeling connected to peers, can influence the positive development of the young people who take part in them (MacDonald et al., 2011). Their study with young athletes found that when subjects had fun, connected with peers, and worked hard toward a goal they

felt they could reasonably reach, they experienced shifts linked with positive development (MacDonald et al., 2011). In this case, the researchers defined positive development as enhanced social and cognitive skills, as well as the ability to set goals and take initiative (MacDonald et al., 2011).

One other study highlighted the importance of youth development through physical activity programs on positive development and well-being. The study examined low-income schools between 2001 and 2007; the students at some of those schools took part in a youth development through physical activity program (while some did not) (Madsen et al., 2011). The study showed that over time, many subjects reported feeling less safe, feeling less connected with caring adults, and having fewer problem solving skills (Madsen et al., 2011). However, for those students who participated in the structured physical activity program, each year of participation was linked to better problem solving skills, more physical activity, and “meaningful participation in school,” as well as “goals and aspirations” (Madsen et al., 2011, p. 464). The authors reported, “these findings stand apart in demonstrating the efficacy of a community program, operating in the school setting, to positively impact emotional well-being and physical health in youth” (Madsen et al., 2011, p. 466).

Simply participating in extracurricular activities, including athletics or youth development groups with a physical activity component may benefit adolescents to some degree (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). However, Theokas et al. (2010) stressed that it takes more than simply showing up to an extracurricular activity to “confer benefits” [from such groups] (p. 79). Bean and Forneris (2016) also stressed that groups must

intentionally teach participants life skills, and if they do, “the sport context may be unique and have greater potential to foster PYD [positive youth development] outcomes” than other types of groups that are also “intentionally structured” (p. 11). Caring climates, invested coaches, and supportive peers are also important parts of groups that may promote positive youth development.

### **Caring Climate**

Gano-Overway (2014) provided a deeper look at caring climates beyond the idea that they should be interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive and make all members feel valuable. She posited that the core of a caring climate is about relationships. She explained that the true “caring” that comprises a caring climate is about a party or parties being able to authentically listen to and empathize with the one(s) they are caring about, and that person (or those people, the ones being cared for) being able to truly accept being cared about (Gano-Overway, 2014).

Gano-Overway (2014) provided examples of the actions that contribute to an athletic climate being perceived as caring by athletes. These examples included coaches accepting athletes as they are, sharing in athletes’ experiences, listening to them, empathizing with them, but also being able to have open discussions with athletes that could challenge them and prompt growth (Gano-Overway, 2014). The caring in a caring climate is about feeling seen, heard, and important, and it’s about feeling as if one is in a place with the support and tools they need to grow; this type of caring can have major benefits for athletes (Gano-Overway, 2014).

Fry and Gano-Overway (2010) suggested that when young athletes perceived their sport climate as being caring, they enjoyed taking part in the sport and felt committed to it (which could lead young people to continue participation and ideally gain as many benefits as possible from their sport). Not only can a caring climate influence young people's feelings toward sport, but this type of atmosphere can also positively influence young participants' attitudes and behaviors. Fry and Gano-Overway (2010) suggested that athletes who perceived their sport climate as caring had more positive attitudes about their coaches and peers, and exhibited more caring behaviors towards others.

Gano-Overway (2013) also posited that when youth perceived their sport climates as caring, they were more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviors. The results from her study indicated that positive attributes, like caring and empathy, were more likely to develop in those who experienced caring climates (Gano-Overway, 2013). The results suggested that when adolescents truly feel cared about, they might actually become more caring. Also, anti-social behaviors, like bullying, were less likely to occur in young people exposed to caring climates (Gano-Overway, 2013).

For active adolescents, certain elements of how they are instructed in physical activity settings may also influence their self-esteem. For adolescent athletes, self-esteem has been linked to their being exposed to positive messages and techniques in a sport setting (including being introduced to the use of tools such as positive thinking and positive self-talk) (Mamassis & Doganis, 2004). Additionally, Newton, Watson, Gano-Overway, Fry, Kim and Magyar (2007) explained that young people exposed to an

intervention that involved a caring sport climate, versus an climate focused on sport skills alone, were more likely to take part in physical activities in the future, and to have more concern for others.

Gould et al. (2012) conducted a study with at-risk youth participating in summer baseball and softball programs. Their results suggested that when adult coaches created caring climates focused on “individual improvement” versus winning, participants acquired life skills and experienced developmental gains (such as gaining emotional regulation skills, relational skills, and the ability to take initiative) (Gould et al., 2012, pp. 81–82). Similarly, Byrd and Martin (2016) found that for youth involved in running programs, perceiving a caring climate had an important impact on their behavior toward others. Young participants who experienced the climates of their running teams as caring were said to display more social responsibility (Byrd & Martin, 2016).

Therefore, the perception of being surrounded by a caring climate, particularly on an athletic team, can benefit athletes’ development and behaviors. Additionally, the concept of caring climate can relate to, and have an impact on, athletes’ well-being (Fry et al., 2012). Reinboth and Duda (2006) found that when athletes saw the climates on their teams as being focused on “reinforcing effort, personal progress, and the view that everyone has an important role on the team,” they felt an increased sense of well-being (p. 281).

### **Positive Coaching**

As the literature involving caring climate demonstrates, how a youth participant

experiences the climate on their team is very important in shaping their development, well-being, and behavior. Hence, it is also important to take a closer look at the actions, attitudes, and qualities of the coaches in charge of creating and maintaining youth sport atmospheres. Specifically, it is necessary to look at what coaches are doing to connect with athletes and to foster their growth *on*, but perhaps more importantly, *off* of “the playing field.”

All coaches, but particularly those who coach children and adolescents, have a great deal of responsibility beyond teaching physical skills. Their actions can impact young people’s feelings about themselves, their experiences with sport, and how their relationships with others evolve (Gould et al., 2012). According to Gould et al. (2012), youth development is more likely to occur through sport if a coach is caring, and sets a tone on the team that allows participants to feel capable of success. Similarly, positive development within and because of youth sport has been linked to quality coaching and quality relationships between coaches and their individual athletes (Vella et al., 2013).

Effective strategies for working with young people, particularly youth that could be considered at-risk, include adults really listening to young people’s feelings, thoughts, and desires (Navin & Jaffe, 2005). Theokas et al. (2010) suggested that coaches be direct and intentional when communicating with athletes, particularly in terms of teaching life skills. According to the authors, coaches should describe the particular life skills they are trying to teach to the athletes, “provide rationales for their use, demonstrate these skills, and provide opportunities for extensive practice of the skill with continuous feedback” (Theokas et al., 2010, p. 79).



Coaches' feelings about their roles shape how they lead their teams and relate to athletes. Lafrenière et al. (2011) found that when coaches had a healthy passion for their roles (as opposed to obsessive views of coaching, which lead to them trying to control athletes) this resulted in them being able to encourage athletes' autonomy. Consequently, when coaches supported athletes acting autonomously, strong relationships between coaches and athletes formed; the authors suggest that these positive relationships prompted athletes' "general happiness" (Lafrenière et al., 2011, pp. 150–151).

Research has also found that young athletes (in this case youth involved in a running program) felt a deeper sense of belonging and connectedness with others when they perceived their relationships with the leaders of their sport teams to be emotionally supportive (Byrd & Martin, 2016). According to a group of youth athletes that reported gaining positive attributes (such as confidence) from sports participation, their positive experiences were due, in part, to the fact that they felt supported by the adults leading the group (Strunin et al., 2010, p. 3).

Another study examined the role that participating in athletics can have in influencing the likelihood that youth will engage in either antisocial or pro-social behaviors (essentially evaluating how sports can shape one's interaction with the world). The study defined antisocial behaviors as violence, crime, and other acts of rebellion, and pro-social behaviors as things like "helping, sharing, and supporting others" (Rutten et al., 2007, p. 258). The findings from this research suggested that young athletes who perceived their personal relationships with coaches as quality, caring ones, were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviors (Rutten et al., 2007).

A qualitative piece by Vella et al. (2013) suggested that some youth sport coaches do realize that they are responsible for more than simply coaching to win competitions. The coaches in that study saw themselves as instrumental in helping to shape the “competence, confidence, connection, and character of youth sport participants” on the playing field, but off as well (Vella et al., 2013, p. 21). According to the authors, coaches also have the potential to influence the development of youth by acting as positive role models (Vella et al., 2013).

One study of high school coaches found that “model” coaches, or those who effectively shaped their athletes as people — not just players — understood their athletes’ “pre-existing make up[s],” including where they may have come from and what life skills they may need (Camiré et al., 2012). These “model coaches” also used sports as a tool to teach life skills (Camiré et al., 2012). To do this, they often used “key words” that resonated with athletes, had athletes reflect about themselves and others (and complete peer evaluations), provided opportunities for athletes to be successful and display skills, modeled appropriate behavior, and took advantage of “teachable moments” (Camiré et al., 2012, p. 256).

Another qualitative study conducted with award winning high school coaches attempted to uncover what these coaches were doing to teach athletes life skills while still running a traditionally successful (i.e. winning) sports team (Gould et al., 2007). The way that the coaches treated players was of utmost importance to those involved in this study. These coaches used (among other things) caring, respect, communication, flexibility, and fun to run their teams (Gould et al., 2007).

These successful coaches also spoke of taking lessons from athletics (for instance, teaching players to ignore “trash talking,” “avoiding the word “win” and stressing the word “achieve,”” and teaching players to be “role models” who motivate each other) and helping players transfer these ideas from sport to their lives (Gould et al., 2007, p. 28). Camiré et al. (2014) also suggested that the coaches who meaningfully connected with athletes and helped them grow were those who were open to growth and learning themselves. Specifically, those coaches who were willing to reflect on their own personal experiences and seek guidance from the helpful experiences of others (Camiré et al., 2014).

Flett, Gould, Griffes and Lauer (2013) found that youth sport coaches in underserved areas found success by supporting players and creating a caring climate. The effective coaches in their study tried to create fun team climates where players were encouraged to be active participants and develop autonomy (Flett et al., 2013, p. 334). Additionally, these coaches worked to help athletes transfer the skills they learned within the sport realm to other areas of life (Flett et al., 2013).

Positive coach/athlete relationships have also been found to satisfy athletes’ need for connectedness, thus leading to higher levels of athlete subjective well-being (Lafrenière et al., 2011, pp. 150–151). Similarly, athletes who perceived having a strong sense of relatedness or connectedness with their coaches throughout the course of a sports season also reportedly had higher levels of well-being (Reinboth & Duda, 2006, p. 282).

Thus, the research suggested that coaches, the way they run their teams and treat athletes can be a powerful force in relation to the development and well-being of those

they coach. One study made it clear, however, that coaching also impacts coaches, not just players (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008). Just as other studies indicated that participants benefited from meaningful coach/athlete connections, coaches also reported higher well-being levels when they felt that they had quality relationships with their athletes (Lafrenière et al., 2008). Similarly, McGonigal (2015) explained that (from her perspective), both coaches and participants in the running-based youth development group, Sole Train, benefited from their interactions. She included a quote from the Director of Sole Train that focused on the importance of the “equality” between adults and youth during Sole Train; in that writing, the head of the program is quoted as saying that the connection and support between Sole Train adults and youth was “the most therapeutic intervention she’s ever seen” [for both the adults and youth involved] (McGonigal, 2015, p. 3 of chapter entitled “A Hand on Your Back”).

### **Positive Peer Relationships**

In addition to the importance of having a supportive, caring adult coach or leader, peer relationships within a sport setting are also important (Vazou et al., 2005). Peers, and their views and opinions, can influence whether young people are willing to even participate in a sport (Vu et al., 2006). If young people do get involved with sports or physical activity groups, Vazou et al. (2005) explained that peers contribute to the creation of a youth sport climate; these other young people can impact sport experiences in different ways than adults can. A positive relationship with peers on a sports team, and feeling accepted and not judged by peers, can lead to athletes enjoying the sport more and

feeling better about themselves (Vazou et al., 2005).

Cox and Ullrich-French (2010) suggested that both adults and peers have the potential to shape how young people think about physical education experiences. Young people had the best physical education experiences when they had positive relationships with both the adult leaders and their peers (Cox & Ullrich-French, 2010, p. 342). The study also found, though, that even when students did not experience positive relationships with the adults in physical activity settings, peer relationships were extremely influential (Cox & Ullrich-French, 2010).

Specifically, positive peer relationships within a physical activity setting were linked to “feelings of greater competence, [higher] overall physical activity levels, and low levels of worry in physical education” (Cox & Ullrich-French, 2010, p. 342). Similarly, Allen (2003) stressed the important role that social relationships play in youth sports. The female adolescent athletes involved in Allen’s (2003) study reportedly felt that their athletic experiences were positive when they felt connected to others on the team, when they succeeded at tasks, and were given positive feedback from teammates.

Participating in groups outside of school (like Sole Train) can both expose young people to peers with similar goals and interests and can allow them to learn and grow because of this exposure. Teens who participate in extracurricular activities have more “academic and pro-social friends” than non-participants (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, p. 517). These pro-social peers (or young people with a positive influence who engage in healthy behaviors and kind treatment of others) can prove beneficial to a young person’s well-being and development (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). The authors suggested that such

positive friends (and connecting with them regularly in after-school programs) could help to protect young people from depression, provide them with support, and help them understand that they are not alone (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005).

MacDonald et al. (2011) found that within youth sport as an extracurricular activity for teens, the “strongest predictor” of personal and social skill development was “affiliation with peers” (p. 42). Because of the important influence that strong peer relationships on a youth sport team can have, the authors suggested that teams be structured in ways that allow for youth to connect, support each other, and form meaningful relationships (MacDonald et al., 2011).

### **Gap in Literature**

The primary goal of this study was first to present readers with insight into the experiences of Sole Train participants and coaches. However, because these experiences were looked in relation to Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being and the concept of caring climate, the study was also designed to add to existing literature on these concepts. The importance of conducting research on the psychological well-being of adolescents was emphasized by Morgan et al. (2009); those authors stated that adolescents are a group whose well-being has not been studied as extensively as that of “adult populations” (p. 2). Similarly, Ruini et al. (2009) highlighted that less work has been done using Ryff’s definition of psychological well-being, and her measurement scale, with adolescents than with people in other age groups (p. 524). Therefore, this study adds to well-being literature by examining the psychological well-being of

adolescents.

Additionally, Ryff (1989) stated that neither her own work, nor the work of other researchers found that “broad social structural factors,” like education, social class, and age, to be things that “account[ed] for the variance” in people’s well-being (p. 1079). This research contributes to well-being literature by specifically exploring how one of participants’ life experiences — taking part in Sole Train — rather than a broad social structural factor, may relate to their psychological well-being.

Ruini et al. (2009) studied whether adolescents who took part in an in-school intervention that used techniques based on WBT experienced changes in their levels of psychological well-being (and found that changes did occur). This study, however, contributes to existing literature by looking at a unique type of intervention, one that does not feature specific WBT techniques. Rather, Sole Train’s programming includes a number of things that have been found to positively impact adolescents. These elements of programming include a positive youth development approach, strong adult leaders, and physical activity component, as well as goals that closely align with Ryff’s (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being.

While less research exist on the psychological well-being of adolescents, according to Gould et al. (2012), less research on caring climates in physical activity settings has been done with at-risk youth than with other populations of young people. This study explored the type of climates adult coaches aimed to create within a group that was initially designed to serve youth in an urban setting.

As was touched upon in the review of relevant literature, less research seems to

exist on the mental health or well-being implications of running (as opposed to exercise generally) on youth and adolescents (as was indicated previously, more research can be found on how running can impact youth physically — both positively and negatively). Specifically, little research can be found about the reasons youth want to start running, what keeps them interested and engaged in continuing to run, and whether running, as a part of a youth development through physical activity program, may have as much or more influence over participants' experiences as the general tone or mission of the entire program. Although this work focused more on Sole Train in relation to the concepts of caring climate and psychological well-being, Chapter 5 discusses the important role of running in Sole Train; therefore, ideally this work can add to the research about running and adolescents (and could possibly lead to other research that focuses even more on emotional impacts of the physical act of running).

Finally, this study was designed to provide “insider perspectives” on what it was actually like to be involved in a particular youth development through physical activity group. It aimed to closely examine one specific group and shed light on what this group does and how it does it. The study was meant to allow both participants and coaches to speak directly to how they experienced the group and to share which aspects or combination of aspects of Sole Train felt most influential and transformative to them. Therefore, it adds to literature on youth development through physical activity groups by sharing accounts of the experiences of people who were involved in one.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Overview**

This section gives readers a rationale for of how this study was constructed. Specifically, it addresses how and why the data was collected and analyzed the way that it was, and how the study's results came to be. A portion of this chapter also gives readers a clearer picture of Sole Train as a program. Details about the Principal Investigator (or PI) who conducted this research and about the subjects involved in this study are also provided in this section; copies of the interview protocols used in this research are attached in Appendix D.

### **Sole Train**

Sole Train is part of Trinity Boston Foundation, a type of “umbrella” organization that runs programs designed to “unlock opportunity and change the odds for the youth of Boston” (Trinity Boston Foundation Website, 2016). The organization strives to empower Boston's youth and help them develop into leaders who are successful into adulthood (Trinity Boston Foundation Website, 2016). Sole Train's main objectives echo the mission of the entire Trinity Boston Foundation.

Sole Train aims to positively impact the lives of adolescents in the Boston area by training them to become runners, and eventually complete either a five-mile race or a half marathon (i.e., Boston's Run to Remember, which takes place each Spring). Sole Train, like some of the other running-based youth development programs mentioned in this

dissertation's literature review, is not focused on creating elite runners who win competitions and who are required to train intensely (or beyond their physical capabilities). Rather, Sole Train is meant to meet participants where they are physically, and to help them realize their potential, achieve "seemingly impossible goals," create success-oriented mindsets, and build on their positive attributes (Sole Train's Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 4).

The Director of Sole Train, who worked for two programs that were part of Trinity Boston Foundation and interacted with some of Boston's young people (and saw the various issues they faced), created Sole Train. The Director of Sole Train became inspired to design and build Sole Train after running a marathon that left her feeling challenged, but empowered (McGonigal, 2015, pp. 1–2 of chapter entitled "A Hand on Your Back;" Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). Sole Train's Director saw and experienced some of the positive impacts that running can have; she then wanted to expose youth (like those she had worked with through Trinity Boston Foundation) to the benefits of the sport (McGonigal, 2015, p. 4 of chapter entitled "A Hand on Your Back;" Sole Train's Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

Sole Train's Director actually started the program in 2009, at which point it was a group of 16 youth and adults training to complete the Boston Athletic Association Half Marathon (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). In its earlier years, Sole Train's structure was similar to that of other youth development/running programs in other urban areas of the United States (e.g., Students

Run L.A. and Students Run Philly Style) (Sole Train Program Description, 2012). Since 2009, Sole Train has grown a great deal. During the 2015–2016 academic year, Sole Train was available in nine Boston Public Schools and one charter school in the city (see Table 3 for details on the number of participants and coaches at each of the sites). Roughly 150 participants completed Boston’s Run to Remember as part of 2015–2016 programming (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

**Table 3: Facts about Coaches and Participants at Sole Train Sites (2015–2016)**

<i>School/Site</i>	<i>Number of Old Soles (including two Site Coordinators)</i>	<i>Number of Young Soles who started the 2015–2016 session</i>	<i>Number of Young Soles who finished the 2015–2016 session</i>
Site 1	6	11	11
Site 2	8	16	13
Site 3	8	9	5
Site 4	13 (Middle school) 8 (High school)	16 (Middle school) 12 (High school)	14 (Middle school) 8 (High school)
Site 5	9–10	16	10
Site 6	10	21	18
Site 7	4 (Started with around 7)	17	11
Site 8	6	5	3
Site 9	9	22	15
Site 10*	6	5	3

*Note:* Table 3 information was taken from personal communication with J. Leffler (September 22, 2016). \*Site 10 is a Charter School; the Director of Sole Train and the PI communicated about this site again at a later date. At that time the PI was told that there are/were 6 Old Soles and 8 Young Soles at that location; the PI believes that there may have been a miscommunication and the Director sent her information about the 2016–2017 season in the more recent correspondence (J. Leffler, personal communication, May 12, 2017).

The program’s creator still directs the entire program and is deeply involved at all program sites and with all group members. An Associate Director and a Program Coordinator are also key members of the program’s leadership team (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). However, the heart and “soul” of Sole

Train are the two groups that actually take part in the program on a day to day basis throughout the academic year — the young runners and the adults that coach them (referred to affectionately by Sole Train staff and in the remainder of this dissertation as “Young Soles” and “Old Soles” respectively).

Clear guidelines exist about how Sole Train’s programming is to be executed at each of its locations. There are parameters about how Old Soles should train participants to develop physically into runners, as well as about how the adolescents should be treated and supported by the adults. Each site also has its own schedule of practices, which typically take place after school two times each week. Every practice has a daily format. This structure involves an opening circle, which is described as a “safe space” for participants (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 14). These take approximately ten minutes each. The opening circles include communication, participants being mindful about where they are emotionally, and a Sole Train cheer (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

The program is based around running, but also recognizes that running can be a difficult physical task, particularly for those who have no running experience. Therefore, the physical activity portion of each practice, which takes place after opening circle, allows participants to either walk or run (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). This indicates that, as was previously noted, Sole Train is trying to encourage participants to be strong, build endurance, and to run without pressuring them to do things that they may not be physically capable of or feel ready for. During this part of each practice, the adults involved with Sole Train are charged with being there for

participants literally every step of the way (regardless of whether the participants are running or walking). Adults run and walk with participants while talking with them, attempting to connect with them, and encouraging them. Practices all conclude with a closing circle where feelings and events from that particular session are discussed and processed as a group (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

Over the course of the academic year, the program has three types of practices: monthly launches, running practices, and skill practices (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). Monthly launches are practices that are held at each site at the beginning of every month. These are described as “curriculum-based community-building practices” (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16). During these practices, Old and Young Soles focus on one selected value and one selected running skill. The overarching values that Sole Train focuses on are connection, courage, and confidence (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Research Guide, 2016–2017).

Sole Train defines connection as “positive bonds with individuals” where “both parties contribute to and benefit from the relationships” (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16). Courage is “openness and readiness” to take risks, and persevere through challenges (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16). Confidence is “an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy” (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16).

The running skills emphasized by Sole Train each month are pacing, distance and

“living out our values/skills” (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16). Pacing focuses on encouraging Young Soles to run for longer each month than they had the month before. Distance means that Young Soles attempt to improve on how far they could run or walk the previous month. The last “running skill” is particularly noteworthy; rather than simply highlighting physical strengths, Young Soles are asked to try to “apply Sole Train values/skills to goals outside of Sole Train” (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 16). In other words, Young Soles are charged with thinking about what they are learning about themselves and their internal strengths within Sole Train and transferring these things to other areas of their lives.

Once a monthly launch practice occurs, the value and skill introduced at that practice is then stressed at running and skills practices (practices that, as their names suggest, focus on physical improvement while including an emphasis on emotional development) throughout the month (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). During these more “routine” practices, Old Soles must review with participants the skills introduced at the monthly launch practices. They must also integrate the particular value and skill into each practice’s opening circle, physical activity, and closing circle (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

No matter the type of practice, Sole Train’s guidelines stress the important role that the Old Soles at each site have (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). No Old Soles are paid to be involved with Sole Train (J. Leffler, personal

communication, September 22, 2016). Many are affiliated with the schools that house their Sole Train sites. Therefore, it is often teachers and administrators from the schools that are dedicating their time to leading Sole Train groups. The lead Old Soles at each site are called Site Coordinators (while all adults at each site — Site Coordinators and adult volunteers — are referred to as “Old Soles”) (J. Leffler, personal communication, September 22, 2016). The Site Coordinators are the ones that are primarily responsible for the administrative duties associated with the program; these include attendance, tracking Young Soles’ mileage, communicating with Young Soles’ guardians, and more (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). The various other Old Sole volunteers assist and support these Site Coordinators throughout the program.

However, the Old Soles at Sole Train — both the Site Coordinators and the other adult volunteers — are more than simply administrators. They are also more than traditional sport coaches who focus primarily on participants’ skill development. These people are in charge helping young people to improve their physical and running skills and getting their participants to the finish line of Boston’s Run to Remember. Perhaps more importantly, though, they are responsible for cultivating caring, supportive communities at their sites, and for making every participant feel capable and important.

Old Soles undergo training prior to coaching; this training process involves taking an online youth safety program, passing CORI checks, and completing a three-hour in person orientation (J. Leffler, personal communication, June 7, 2017, and June 8, 2017). At the in-depth orientation, which is designed to explain both the administrative and emotional expectations that Sole Train has for coaches, all volunteers are able to connect



with fellow coaches, and are expected to leave with a clear understanding of the program and its mission (Old Soles' Orientation Guide, 2016). The orientation is also meant to help coaches understand their roles and duties, look ahead at the upcoming year, and learn how to “foster the kind of energy and community” that Sole Train hopes for at each of its sites (Old Soles' Orientation Guide, 2016, p. 1). Coaches are also trained on how to facilitate opening and closing circles at their sites, and how to think critically and deal with important issues that participants may face, including racism; the orientation also stresses the importance of coaches creating warm, welcoming climates where Sole Train participants may be able to achieve success (Old Soles' Orientation Guide, 2016)<sup>3</sup>.

Additional guidance for coaches is provided in the resource guide given to all Old Soles prior to the onset of programming; in this document, Old Soles are instructed that no member of their group should ever run alone (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). Old Soles are told that they should always run with Young Soles, and that Young and Old Soles alike should support all fellow “Sole Trainers” (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). Sole Train also guides adults on how to act as mentors. Adults are urged to be flexible and open with participants, to be consistent and present, and to be a friend that does not try to “fix” participants (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 55).

Sole Train is also focused on screening and training adults to appropriately work with young people. As was mentioned earlier, conducting CORI checks on all adults, and training them in youth safety, are important steps taken before anyone becomes a

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<sup>3</sup> The PI is not aware of whether there have been problems with volunteers in the past.

coach (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 26). Sole Train also emphasizes to adult leaders that setting “appropriate boundaries” is a necessary part of their roles. The program instructs adults to (among other things) make sure that all interactions with participants adhere to the law, that they disclose any information that suggests a youth (or someone else) might be in danger<sup>4</sup>, that no interaction with a participant is behind closed doors, and that all coach/participant exchanges should be about “building and supporting feelings of connectedness, empowerment, positive values, social competencies, and/or building positive identity” (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, pp. 18–19).

Sole Train is based, in part, on the idea that the program is a community that cannot function if all parties do not contribute. Sole Train's leaders set expectations not only for Old Soles, but for Young Soles and for their families, too. First, no Young Sole is forced to take part in Sole Train. They must volunteer to be a part of the program. If they do, Sole Train asks that they commit to taking part for the entire school year; this means that Young Soles must be physically and emotionally present and push themselves throughout the program (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017).

Young Soles are asked to attend all practices (which occur after school hours and occasionally on Saturdays) and all mandatory Sole Train events (which include team-building events and races) (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). When Young Soles are at Sole Train they are expected to demonstrate effort, be

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<sup>4</sup> The PI is not certain whether Old Soles are mandatory reporters.

energetic, and support their teammates (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). They are also encouraged to use the values and lessons learned at Sole Train in their lives outside of the group, too.

Parents and caregivers need to be active members of Sole Train when possible, as well. Sole Train asks that they are supportive and encouraging of their children's participation, that they communicate with Site Coordinators to make sure that children can physically be where they need to be, and, if possible, to attend the races that their child will run (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). According to the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017), parents and guardians should know that feeling supported, loved, and seen can change the lives of their young people.

### **The Principal Investigator**

The Principal Investigator (or PI) in this study is Kristen Chipman Machon, a graduate student pursuing her doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology with a Specialization in Sport Psychology at Boston University's School of Education. Sole Train is a group connected to the PI's personal and professional background and interests. The PI is recreational athlete and has personal experience with the sense of accomplishment that can come with achieving physical goals.

The PI has also worked with youth in a number of physical activity settings (including an urban high school and elementary school, and as the Youth Wellness Director at a non-profit fitness facility for women and children in Boston). Additionally,

the PI worked with a youth development through physical activity program that intentionally aimed to create a caring climate for adolescent participants. This research helped the PI to increase her understanding about what the benefits of a youth development through physical activity group may be for adolescents, and how/why these benefits may occur.

### **Subjects and Processes**

The results of this study are based on interviews conducted with four coaches (or Old Soles) that took part in Sole Train's 2015–2016 programming, as well as five adolescent participants (or Young Soles) who took part during that same year. This study had a total of nine subjects for two reasons. First, as will be described below, the PI was only connected to the program through its Director. This person provided the names of potential participants, and the PI attempted to contact the potential subjects whose information she provided; therefore the number of subjects was based on access to participants and convenience. However, the Director of Sole Train was extremely helpful and accommodating throughout the process, and if the PI felt that she had needed more participants, she is certain the Director would have helped her obtain additional names. Once the interviews began, though, the PI did see many similarities between what subjects were saying, which indicated to the PI that she was approaching data saturation and that additional subjects were not essential<sup>5</sup>.

While interviews were conducted with those subjects, the Director of Sole Train

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<sup>5</sup> The PI realizes that it may have been helpful to try to reach out to Young Soles from different Sole Train sites. However, because contacting the Young Sole participants presented its own challenges (described in the discussion section of this dissertation), the PI did not attempt to ensure that a Young Sole from each site was interviewed.

was also vital to the development of this study. Prior to interviewing any of the subjects for this study, the PI was in touch with the Director of Sole Train often via email and phone. This individual provided insight about the program (as she provided program descriptions from 2012, 2015, and 2016–2017, and also answered questions that came up throughout the research process). She also acted as a liaison between the PI and all subjects (see the following section for additional information on the Director of Sole Train's role in the recruitment of this study).

The researcher received approval from Boston University's Institutional Review Board in the summer of 2016, prior to any data collection. Once the necessary approval was received, the PI worked with the Director of Sole Train to connect with Old and Young Soles who would be eligible for the study and willing to take part.

**Eligibility.** In order to be eligible to be a part of this study, youth participants had to have been involved with Sole Train from the beginning to the end of 2015–2016 programming. They also had to have completed either the five-mile race or the half marathon at the culmination of the program. Coaches had to have coached for the entire 2015–2016 Sole Train season. See Table 4 for information on the Old Soles who took part in this study, and Table 5 for information on the Young Soles who took part.

**Recruitment process.** Wallace & Bartlett (2013) suggested that enlisting a person that potential study participants trust might be an effective way to recruit subjects; such was the case with this work. Per Boston University's Institutional Review Board's approval, the PI provided the Director of Sole Train (who has access to all involved with Sole Train, and is a trusted figure in the program) with a recruitment form and detailed

informational sheets for all potential subjects who fit the study's eligibility criteria (see Appendix A for the approved recruitment materials and see Appendix B for the approved informational sheets). The PI asked the Director of Sole Train to distribute these across the Sole Train sites. The purpose of creating and administering these forms was to ensure that all potential study participants (and their parents/guardians when appropriate) were clear on what would be asked of them should they agree to be a part of the study.

First, there were informational forms for potential study participants ages 18 and up to review (these were for both program participants between the ages of 18 to 20 and adult coaches). The PI also provided the Sole Train director with forms for young people under 18 (written in age-appropriate language) and informational forms for their parents and/or guardians. All of these forms explained the study's purpose, as well as the risks that those involved could face. The forms also listed the PI's contact information; a statement indicating that participants were able to discontinue their study involvement at any time, and for any reason, was also included. These forms emphasized that it is the PI's responsibility to keep all data gathered during the course of the study confidential. Finally, these documents stated that participants' names, and any characteristics that might identify them would not be included in any writing that may be done on the research (see Appendix B).

After these forms were distributed, the Director of Sole Train identified both Old and Young Soles who were interested in actually being part of this research. The Director of Sole Train collected contact information from all those who were willing to become subjects; this person then shared this information with the PI. The PI then

reached out the potential subjects to set up phone interview times.

The PI worked with a representative from Boston University's Institutional Review Board who contacted the PI as part of a routine procedure to ensure that all studies are carried out in the most appropriate manner. This person advised the PI that all subjects should have copies of the actual consent forms, rather than just informational sheets (L. Thomas, personal communication, October 3, 2016). At that point, the PI had already conducted a number of interviews, as she had been working under the guidelines that were approved for the study by the Institutional Review Board. The PI then emailed consent forms to all subjects that she had already spoken with so that they had these for their records, too, per the recommendation from Boston University's Institutional Review Board (Consent and Assent forms used in this study are attached in Appendix C). From that point forward, all subjects were emailed consent and assent forms to review prior to their interviews, when possible (or just after their interviews concluded if the PI did not have an email address prior to the interview). All participants received the documents for their review via email.

It should be noted that contacting the Young Soles for this study was a more challenging process than anticipated. The Director of Sole Train emailed the PI with five potential Young Sole participants in October 2016. Despite leaving voice mails, emails and texts for all of these potential subjects between October and December 2016, the PI was only successful in setting up and completing an interview with one of these Young Soles. Therefore, the PI reconnected with the Director of Sole Train who sent along the names and contact information for additional possible youth participants and their

parents/guardians. Literature has explored the challenges of recruiting and interviewing youth and teens for research studies; recommendations on how best to conduct research with young people include trying to build trust in order to recruit participants, and attempting to make participation convenient for subjects (e.g., Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski, & Chapman, 2008; Wallace & Bartlett, 2013).

The Director of Sole Train had connected with the parents of the new group of potential youth subjects, too, to ensure that they were aware of their children's potential participation in this research (and were supportive of this). Because the PI was provided with the contact information for the new group of potential youth interviewees and the parents of these Young Soles, she was able to set up phone interview times with them. The PI ended up completing five phone interviews with Young Soles, and was able to speak with the parents of all youth participants and receive their verbal consent prior to interviewing any minors.

Two of these Young Soles were siblings who both took part in Sole Train. Again, the PI checked in with a representative from Boston University's Institutional Review Board to ensure that this would not be an issue or compromise the privacy of either subject (L. Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2016).

**Subjects: Sole Train coaches or "Old Soles."** As the section detailing Sole Train explained, adults at each of the Sole Train sites are responsible for "running" the running groups. The Old Soles that are the primary leaders are the Site Coordinators. Each site typically has two. These people plan practices, take care of all administrative duties related to the young people at their sites, are present at practices, and are the



“main” group coaches throughout the entire year. Site Coordinators are the ones who really set the tone for their groups, and who must ensure that every practice is run according to Sole Train’s structure and overarching goals.

Four (again, this number of subjects was based on access, convenience, and the eventual similarities emerged from the data they provided) of the approximately twenty Sole Train Site Coordinators who were involved in the 2015–2016 academic year were interviewed in this study. The duration of this study refers to the four coaches as either “Old Soles,” or as Coach 1, Coach 2, Coach 3, and Coach 4. Each of these coaches managed groups that were slightly different regarding participants’ ages, group size, and participants’ histories and need levels. See Table 3 for breakdown of the (approximate) numbers of coaches and participants at each site; see Table 4 for details on each coach including their age, gender, race, and Sole Train site.

**Table 4: Old Sole Information**

<i>Old Sole</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Site</i>
Coach 1	32	Male	Caucasian	Site 1
Coach 2	52	Female	Bi-racial	Site 4
Coach 3	35	Female	Caucasian	Site 9
Coach 4*	30	Male	Caucasian	Site 4

*Note:* \*Coach 4 did not attend the race at the end of 2015–2016 programming because of a personal obligation. He was included in this study because he did coach for the entire season, despite not being able to attend the event. He did attend the event for the two previous years and spoke to his experiences on those race days during his interview.

**Subjects: Youth participants or “Young Soles.”** Five (again, this number was based on access, convenience, and the eventual similarities in the data they provided) Young Soles who participated in Sole Train during the 2015–2016 program were interviewed as a part of this study. The remainder of this study will refer to these individuals as Young Soles or as Runner 1, Runner 2, Runner 3, Runner 4, and Runner 5. See Table 5 for each runner’s information. This information includes their age, race, gender, their Sole Train site, and whether they completed the five-mile race or the half marathon in the spring of 2016.

**Table 5: Young Sole Information**

<i>Young Sole</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Five-mile or half marathon</i>
Runner 1	17	Female	Asian	Site 4	Five-mile
Runner 2	12	Male	Caucasian/Asian	Site 9	Half marathon
Runner 3	13	Female	Caucasian/Asian	Site 9	Half marathon
Runner 4	11	Male	Caucasian/Asian	Site 9	Half marathon
Runner 5	12	Male	Caucasian	Site 9	Half marathon

### **Data Collection**

**Interviews with Sole Train coaches or “Old Soles.”** The PI spoke with each of the four coaches via phone in the summer of 2016. Each conversation began the same way. The PI explained that conversations would be on speakerphone and audio recorded.

The PI then read a verbal consent script aloud; these consent forms stated that there would be no negative repercussions if the coaches did not want to participate in the study (see Appendix C). At the end of the consent script, the coach was asked to state whether they agreed to be a part of the study and continue on with interview questions. Each of the four coaches provided verbal consent.

The PI then began each interview with demographic questions to gather basic information from coaches (including their age, gender, race, and reasons for coaching Sole Train). The PI then asked the coaches more detailed questions about their experiences with Sole Train. Interview questions were asked in a semi-structured way. The questions in the interviews acted as guides meaning that the intention behind all questions was covered, but the order and the phrasing of the questions varied, at times, depending on how each conversation evolved.

Additionally, when appropriate, the PI asked follow up questions or asked the interviewee to elaborate on statements that they made. Examples of questions in the approved interview guides for Sole Train coaches (attached in Appendix D) included, “Tell me a little bit about how you aimed to treat the Sole Train participants; if you had to give me adjectives to describe how you treated your participants, what would you say?,” “Tell me about the type of atmosphere you aimed to create at your Sole Train site (did you try to make participants feel supported/cared about there? In your opinion, were people at your site kind or unkind to one another?),” and, “Tell me about changes that you saw in participants from the beginning to the end of the program (if you did see any changes).” The conversations were intended to last for about 30 minutes each. These

interviews actually ranged in length from approximately 22 minutes to 35 minutes each (reading the verbal consent forms to coaches and receiving their consent took about three to four minutes per conversation, meaning that the actual time spent on the phone ranged from about 26 to 39 minutes).

As was previously noted, the PI had a routine phone meeting with a representative from Boston University's Institutional Review Board in the fall of 2016. The PI was advised to email all coaches with a copy of the consent forms for the study to ensure that they had these for their records. The PI did email these people with these documents in early October 2016.

**Interviews with Sole Train youth participants or "Young Soles."** The PI spoke with five Young Soles on the telephone in the fall of 2016. As a representative from Boston University's Institutional Review Board directed, the PI emailed consent and assent forms to the minor subjects and their parents/guardians. Each Young Sole interview began with the PI speaking with a parent. The PI let each parent know that their conversation would be on speakerphone and audio recorded. The PI then read the parental consent forms aloud. These are included in Appendix C and stated that they were under no obligation to have their children take part in the study. After the PI finished going over these forms, parents were asked whether they allowed the minor in their care to be a part of the study. All provided verbal consent. The PI then asked that the phone be passed to the Young Sole.

The PI proceeded to cover the verbal assent forms aloud with Young Sole; as with the parental consent forms, these forms stated that Young Soles did not have to agree to

take part and that there would be no repercussions should they decide not to take part. Each young person provided verbal assent after the form was read. As with the interviews with the Old Soles, the Young Sole interviews began by gathering demographic information about subjects (including age, gender, race, Sole Train site, and which race they completed during the 2016 Run to Remember). Interviews went on to ask more in-depth questions about each Young Sole's Sole Train experience.

Again, as with the Old Sole interviews, the intentions behind the questions included in the interview guides were covered, but the interviews were conversational and allowed for the subjects to speak to each question and related topic as much or as little as they liked. Follow up questions were asked and different topics were covered when the PI felt that gathering additional information was necessary and appropriate. Examples of questions covered in the Young Soles interviews included, "Tell me about the type of atmosphere at your Sole Train site (did you feel supported/cared about there? Were people kind or unkind to one another?)," "Talk about whether taking part in Sole Train made you think about who you are and who you can be in the future. Tell me about whether participation made you think about what you are able to accomplish differently," and, "What do you think/feel about yourself now that Sole Train is over?"

The interviews with Young Soles were intended to last for about 30 minutes. Covering the consent and assent forms and receiving consent and assent took about six to eight minutes per Young Sole interview (because the PI went over consent/assent with both adults and minors). It is important to note that as a group, the Young Soles were a bit less talkative than the Old Soles. Some Young Soles provided shorter responses to

questions than others or did not elaborate when providing answers. The PI attempted to gather information from the Young Soles while trying not pry. The actual interview discussion times (when removing the time it took to receive verbal consent and assent) with the Young Soles ranged from 15 to 39 minutes.

### **Qualitative Measures**

**Interviews.** The PI created all interviews used in this study. The PI's previous involvement in qualitative research projects (including Baltzell, Caraballo, Chipman & Hayden (2014)), her graduate training in research methodology, and her review of appropriate literature (including youth development though physical activity literature) equipped her with the tools needed to craft interviews. Boston University's Institutional Review Board approved the interviews prior to the PI contacting any study subjects.

The interviews were designed to allow both Old and Young Soles to reflect upon and speak about their experiences with Sole Train as a part of the 2015–2016 program. Specific questions were crafted by the PI with the main concepts of this study in mind: caring climate and psychological well-being. Questions were created based on the PI's experiences through previous studies that included open-ended interviewing methodology (including Baltzell et al., 2014). The questions were designed with the intention of allowing subjects to reflect and speak to the topics contained within them as much or as little as they liked

As was mentioned in the previous section, the Old Sole interview guides included questions that focused on the climate that they attempted to create within their Sole Train

groups. These also contained questions about whether they perceived changes in their participants during or after programming and if so, how the youth seemed changed. The interview guides for Young Soles were made up of questions asking about their general experiences, their thoughts on the atmosphere that their coaches cultivated, and whether they perceived program participation as having influenced them in ways related to the six dimensions of psychological well-being (as defined by Ryff (1989)). Again, see Appendix D for full guides for both Old and Young Soles.

Additionally, the version of the Young Sole interview guide attached in Appendix D includes information explaining the PI's thought process when creating certain questions (specifically questions focusing on various dimensions of psychological well-being and caring climate). The PI's notes are each marked with an asterisk. When the PI spoke with interviewees, the PI only asked interview questions and did not include the text marked with an asterisk. The PI was the only person who was involved in crafting the interview questions and eventually analyzing the data. See Chapter 5 for more information on PI's role in this study, and the limitations her role may have caused.

**Observation.** The PI also attended and took part in one of Sole Train's events, a 5K run, in the fall of 2016 (the PI went as a participant-observer). It was important to the PI to actually see Sole Train in action to gain a broader understanding of how the group functions, what one of their race days is like, and the types of relationships that exist between members (that even an outsider could observe while simply being around the group). Attending this event helped the PI to put portions of the data provided during interviews into context as she gained a clearer picture of what group dynamics were like.

The PI contacted Boston University's Institutional Review Board prior to attending this race and received approval to attend and observe the group (again, the PI (and her family) opted to participate in the event, as well).

No field notes were taken and no formal study procedures were carried out at this event. The PI only received approval to attend and observe, and the PI went with the intention of really trying to experience what a Sole Train race was like. Although the PI did not written take notes during the race, particular events from the day stood out to the PI (and the PI took mental note of these). As the PI was interpreting and writing up the study's results based on the data from interviews, she reflected on the events that she considered meaningful from the day of the 5K and tried to incorporate these into the results section when appropriate.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were conducted on speakerphone when the PI was alone and in a private location. Each interview was audio taped by the PI as they were conducted. The PI then transcribed each interview. The PI then analyzed the data.

The PI's data analysis process was closely aligned with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). According to Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012), IPA researchers should aim to learn about how subjects view particular experiences. In the case of the present study, the PI's main goal was to learn about how subjects made sense of their time with Sole Train, with an emphasis on their views of Sole Train's climate and on whether and how Sole Train may have influenced



psychological well-being. Nilges (2004) used a type of phenomenological approach in a qualitative study on movement meaning with fifth-grade students; the author stated, “the reader of the phenomenological report should gain a better understanding of the “essence,” or what it was like for participants to experience the phenomenon in question” (300).

IPA requires that researchers first, “try to understand what an experience (object or event) is like from the participant’s perspective” based on the information subjects provide (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, pp. 362–363). Next, IPA also involves the researcher looking at the information provided by subjects and thinking critically about it and interpreting whether there is meaning in the data beyond what was plainly stated (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Because the PI has a background with running and with youth development through physical activity programs, she felt connected to the topic and appreciated the opportunity to add her own perspective and interpretation to the study’s results.

First, the PI went through the data from the Old Soles’ interviews and broke down responses based on the ideas presented in these. In IPA, researchers are asked to review transcribed data and take notes that point to the “emergent themes” present (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 367). In the case of this study, the PI’s initial notes on the data, or her version of emergent themes, were codes. The PI’s codes were short words or phrases that connected to particular meaning units and the ideas contained within these. The researcher determined that two or more occurrences of ideas resulted in a code.

Once codes were established, the PI categorized these (or grouped these together

based on meaningful connections) to come up with sub-themes. Consistent with IPA, (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) codes clustered into sub-themes based on similarities. Sub-themes that meaningfully connected were then grouped into themes.

Simple, conversational responses from participants that did not pertain to the substance of the interviews were not given codes (for instance, when a subject stated their age, race, or their Sole Train site). While all coded data was assigned a sub-theme, there are times when the coded data may not have not fit neatly or precisely into that sub-theme, but did connect to it in some way (an instance of this would be “joined because of friends” under the “positive relations with others” sub-theme that emerged from the Young Sole data, see Chapter 4). The PI noted these instances when discussing the sub-themes and codes in Chapter 4, and the PI’s rationale for assigning such codes to particular sub-themes is also presented.

Unique codes, sub-themes, and themes were developed for Old Sole interviews, while Young Sole interviews were given their own codes, sub-themes, and themes. Detailed information (based on data from interviews and the perspective of the PI) on the codes, sub-themes and themes that emerged from Old and Young Sole interviews is shared in Chapter 4 of this piece. Supporting quotes from interviews are also provided in Chapter 4 to give the reader a sense of the overall content of the interviews and to clarify the PI’s rationale for code, sub-theme, and theme creation.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The following section shares the results that emerged from the data collected throughout this study. This section explains the major themes that were developed based on the data, the sub-themes that made these up, as well as the codes that comprised the sub-themes. Both the results from the Old and Young Soles data are presented in this section.

Quotes to support the PI's rationale for coding (and then creating sub-themes and themes) were extracted from the data and are also included in this section. This chapter goes into detail about the themes related to Old and Young Soles' experiences with Sole Train and about the potential connections between Sole Train and psychological well-being and carling climate. Prior to the detailed explanation of the results, see Table 6 for context in terms of the reasons interviewees (Old and Young Soles, respectively) provided for becoming involved with Sole Train.

**Table 6: Reasons for Sole Train Involvement (Old and Young Soles)**

<i>Reasons for Coaching Sole Train (Old Soles)</i>	<i>Reasons for Joining Sole Train (Young Soles)</i>
Coach 1:	Runner 1:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perceived group as positive</li> <li>- Had a past working in youth services</li> <li>- Worked at school/site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hoped to develop friendships</li> <li>- Hoped to meet new people</li> </ul>
Coach 2:	Runner 2:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committed to helping students achieve goals</li> <li>- Worked at school/site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined because of friends</li> <li>- Thought ST sounded fun</li> <li>- Hoped to meet new people</li> <li>- Hoped to improve physically</li> </ul>
Coach 3:	Runner 3:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thought of a particular young person who could benefit from ST</li> <li>- Teacher at school/site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher encouraged her to join</li> <li>- Joined because of friends</li> <li>- Thought ST sounded fun</li> <li>- Hoped to meet new people</li> <li>- Hoped to develop friendships</li> </ul>
Coach 4:	Runner 4:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referred through coworker</li> <li>- Worked at school/site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did it “for himself”</li> <li>- Hoped to improve health</li> <li>- Heard positive things about the site coordinator</li> </ul>
	Runner 5:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined because of friends</li> <li>- Thought ST sounded fun</li> <li>- Thought ST sounded like a “good accomplishment”</li> </ul>

*Note:* Sole Train abbreviated as “ST”

### **Results from Interviews with Old Soles**

Three main themes emerged from the four interviews conducted with Old Soles. These are: “Attempted to create caring climates,” “Perceived psychological well-being changes,” and “Old Soles positively impacted.” See Table 7 for a breakdown of these three primary themes and the sub-themes and codes that comprised them. These themes, their respective sub-themes, along with codes, quotes, and examples from interviews, are discussed in the following section.

**Table 7: Old Sole Results**

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Attempted to create caring climates	Created interpersonally inviting groups	- Everyone welcome - *ST perceived as positive - Fun - I am ST
	Created safe groups	- Predictable = safe - Clear = safe - Safe enough to take risks - Physical/emotional safety
	Created respectful groups	- Notice and respect youth - Youth supporting youth
	Supported youth	- Building I can mindsets - Warm toward team
Perceived psychological well-being changes	Perceived self-acceptance changes	- Self-esteem/confidence - Pride
	Perceived positive relations changes	- Strong connections within Sole Train - Youth as invested
	Perceived autonomy changes	- Leadership - Transfer - Self-directed
	Perceived purpose in life changes	- Setting and achieving goals - Had to do the “hard thing”
	Perceived personal growth changes	- Encouraged introspection - Positive changes in participants - Opened up
	Perceived environmental mastery changes	- New experience
Old Soles positively impacted	Worked through challenges	- Positive experience for coaches - “Every day” challenges - Difficult days - Loyal
	Experienced personal or professional growth	- **Youth focused backgrounds - Professional growth - Learned about self
	Surprised or moved by participants	- Impressed by Young Soles’ athletic abilities or progress - Emotionally impacted

*Note:* ST is an abbreviation for Sole Train. The codes marked as \*, and \*\* may not fit exactly into the sub-themes they were assigned. The PI’s rationale for assigning them to their specific sub-theme will be explained in the following section.

**Theme 1: Attempted to create caring climates.** According to the data gathered from Old Soles, they did attempt to create caring climates within their Sole Train groups. All four of the coaches spoke lovingly about their Sole Train teams and the individuals on them. They described trying to make their groups feel like “families” where all members were important, welcomed, and respected. Therefore, the first theme from the Old Soles interviews is, “Attempted to create caring climates.” The following four sub-themes made up this theme:

- Created interpersonally inviting groups: This sub-theme contained codes that the PI viewed as pertaining to Old Soles trying to make Young Soles feel welcome in, and connected to, Sole Train.
- Created safe groups: This sub-theme was made up of codes connected to Old Soles attempting to create a climate where youth could feel emotionally and physically safe and comfortable.
- Created respectful groups: Codes that made up this sub-theme focused on times that coaches stressed attempting to treat youth with respect and when they discussed encouraging respect among all team members.
- Supported youth: The codes included in this sub-theme pertained to coaches trying to build up youth and to being kind and encouraging toward them.

***Sub-theme 1: Created interpersonally inviting groups.*** Some of the Young Soles who participate in Sole Train are adolescents who, according to the Old Soles, have traditionally struggled to “fit in.” They may have had trouble with familial relationships,

their peer groups, or in academic settings. However, the coaches interviewed attempted to make their Sole Train teams inviting to all kids. The code “everyone welcome” emerged from the data; on a number of occasions coaches spoke about wanting make their Sole Train teams places where all were accepted. One coach said about his mission to make all feel welcome on his team, “My main goal was to have an opportunity for students who didn’t normally fit into the mold of a traditional sports team to feel a part of a team.”

Sole Train was also described by the coaches as a place that not only welcomes all youth at the onset of programming, but as a place where youth are welcomed back (should they have an issue within the group or stop attending training regularly) and accepted almost unconditionally. The coaches interviewed in this piece spoke of trying to make all participants feel respected and included. One coach, in regards to welcoming youth, said,

[Sole Train’s] a program that doesn’t close its doors, you know, it’s very rehabilitative. I’ve seen it be very cathartic and very therapeutic for so many children. So as an organization, I think it always welcomes children back, that has been my experience, and for a long time the program partnered with the Department of Youth Services supporting, you know, young men and young women who were transitioning back from that setting, so it’s, I think, very inclusive, very supportive, and something at the heart of the organization is that understanding, unwavering acceptance.

According to the coaches, Sole Train, as a program, radiates positivity. They described it as seeming attractive and inviting not just to young people, but also to other adults in their school/site communities. Therefore, sections of the Old Sole interviews were coded as “Sole Train perceived as positive.” In fact, one coach said that their entire school community viewed Sole Train as being a place that would welcome them and could benefit them. This reputation resulted in two teachers at that particular school committing to join as volunteer Old Soles every week throughout the 2015–2016 program. One interviewee spoke of other adults coming to cheer for, and sometimes run with, their Sole Train team, simply to be a part of this group that seemed to be doing such good, fun things.

The code “Sole Train perceived as positive,” particularly to other adults, may not fit exactly with the idea that coaches were trying to create interpersonally inviting groups. In terms of a caring climate, youth participants are really the ones who need to experience the group’s climate as being inviting. However, this code was included under his sub-theme, as the PI interpreted the fact that others outside of the group viewed it as something they might want to be part of, and could easily join, as speaking to coaches creating inviting climates generally.

Part of the reason that both young people and other adults were drawn to the group may be that coaches tried to make their Sole Train groups fun. The coaches each spoke about the ways they tried to make their groups fun. Therefore, portions of the Old Sole interviews were coded with the word “fun.” One coach talked about the fun she had while coaching. She also said Sole Train was “just happiness” for her participants.



Another coach, in an animated tone, described his approach to creating a fun space for participants by saying, “I was just the most excited dude at the party. If I wasn’t the most pumped up person to be there, then that was a problem. Just made sure to set the tone.”

Another coach spoke about trying to have fun with her Young Soles even on tough days. She spoke about the fact that Sole Train is a running group that practices, in part, in Boston in the winter. Distance running alone can be difficult, but this coach spoke about the added challenge of motivating a group of young people to run outside in rain, sleet, snow, and low temperatures. She said that no matter what obstacle her team faced her goal was to “just try and make sure that everyone’s laughing.” She went on to provide examples of her attempts to create fun for her team by saying,

But we’ll like make up silly rules or silly games like, you know, today our silly rule is that if the, you know, if the temperature is at or above the legal driving age we’re going outside, you know, we’re going outside. So that’s just something really stupid and funny you know, and I don’t know, we just try and treat running like play.

The PI experienced the inviting and fun tone of Sole Train when she attended their 5K event in October 2016. The PI witnessed some of the enjoyable parts of Sole Train as groups of Old and Young Soles danced, hugged, and joked with each other before the race even began (much like what McGonigal (2015) described witnessing when she observed a Sole Train race). Once the race started, Old and Young Soles high-

fived the PI and even, at times, cheered for *her* (Again, McGonigal (2015) wrote of a similar experience; she said that when she met Young Soles at one of their races they urged her to run “despite the fact that they had never met me and I wasn’t dressed for it) (p. 2 of chapter entitled “A Hand on Your Back”).

In the PI’s experience, the individuals did not know that she was connected in any way to Sole Train, they simply cheered for her because there appeared to be a sense within Sole Train that supporting others who are trying “is just what you do.” All seemed to be welcome at Sole Train; the PI got the feeling that if you choose to take part (in a Sole Train activity), you will be supported, celebrated, and allowed to be part of the fun. McGonigal (2015) wrote of the contagious nature of the good feelings radiated at the Sole Train event she attended. She wrote, “watching the runners, I was filled with joy, and found myself wishing I were part of the community and not just an observer for the day” (McGonigal, 2015, p. 1 of chapter entitled “A Hand on Your Back”).

In fact, during the 5K that the PI attended, those running and cheering could be often heard saying, “Let’s go Sole Train!” as opposed to yelling individuals’ names. This speaks to the fact that not only does Sole Train feel like a welcoming place where kids find themselves fitting in, but, for some participants, being involved in the group actually becomes part of their identities. This idea came up in the Old Soles’ interviews, too. Therefore, sections of interview data were coded with the phrase “I am Sole Train.” One coach talked about how participants identified with Sole Train, and benefited from feeling like a part of something, by saying,

What I have witnessed and seen consistently is a lot more sense of identity, like, this is who I am. When you, you hook kids up with shoes and shirts and the track jackets and you have those races every week, you do the practice every week, and they're consistent and there's events, it's official, kids will take that on, and they're very proud of themselves. So, it's, you know, you know I wish there was data, I wish we had hard data to tell you like, if you do Sole Train this, this is the academic improvement...but in terms of the social, emotional development, it's humongous, and I see, I see kids just really identify with "I am Sole Train, this is who I am." You know what I mean? So that's really, really powerful.

***Sub-theme 2: Created safe groups.*** All four coaches spoke about attempting to make their groups safe. The coaches discussed trying to lead their groups to be both structured and predictable. The coaches did this so that Young Soles knew what to expect from their time with the group. For adolescents, particularly those who may face serious risks (outside of Sole Train) or unexpected situations regularly, having Sole Train be a structured place could have potentially provided feelings of safety and security.

Thus, portions of the Old Soles' interviews were coded as "predictable = safe." The coaches referenced "the importance of structure" and "striving for consistency" and sticking to routines (the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017) also stressed that routines can help participants feel safe). Each coach mentioned the opening and closing circles that occurred during every Sole Train practice. They described these rituals as important times for Sole Train groups to process feelings,

discuss challenges, and praise one another. One coach said, “When I had my end of the year reflection meeting with the Directors of Sole Train we talked, you know, we talked about how important the structures of each practice were.” Another coach explained why routine is imperative at Sole Train by saying,

When these students know what to expect — even if it’s something that they don’t really want — they’re craving that consistency so that things are predictable and they’re not set off by changes like they have a lot in their own personal lives. We try to make this a supportive environment where you kind of know where things are going.

Being transparent or clear with participants was also important to the coaches. They discussed their attempts to be forthcoming and thorough when explaining what would be expected of the Young Soles during any given practice or race situation. The coaches tried to make Sole Train a safe place by being upfront and honest with participants, and limiting the number of uncomfortable surprising situations that Young Soles might face. Thus, the code “clear = safe” labeled portions of the Old Soles’ data.

The coaches talked about being aware that distance running could be intimidating to a young person with little experience with the sport. They tried to be clear with participants by breaking down potential running challenges into manageable pieces. They spoke of doing this to try to keep participants from getting overwhelmed. One coach summarized this idea by saying,

So what does 5 miles look like? And we walk them through what that process is, and for a kid, they don't understand, can't conceptualize what a mile even looks like, so it's mapping out courses where, um, they know that, you know, let's just say they go from my school to the actual location of where Sole Train is, that that's a mile, and then what does that look like? And then through that process of, um, you know we're gonna, ' we're going to run and we're going to learn how to pace ourselves and, you know, how much can you start out with if you walk the first mile, great, and then the next week when we run we're gonna' run from this particular sign to the next sign, and then we're going to the walk to the light in between, and then we're going to run to the next sign, so constantly building and teaching them about stamina and pacing.

The PI witnessed a Sole Train coach leading their group in this way. During Sole Train's 5K event, the PI was surrounded by clusters of Young Soles and their coaches on the race route. One group was walking just ahead of the PI. The PI could overhear the coach encouraging participants to transition from walking to running, and listened to his attempts to make running portions of the course seem less daunting. He was pointing out trees where he wanted the group to start and stop running. He appeared to be trying to make them feel safe and capable; by pointing out landmarks he was attempting to help participants actually see that their bursts of running could be achieved, as they had clear beginnings and endings. This coach was also utilizing a tip provided by the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017); the document advised coaches

that pointing out landmarks might be helpful and motivational for runners (p. 42).

The Old Soles also touched on working to make their Young Soles feel safe enough to push their limits. The code “safe enough to take risks” was used to label sections of data that spoke to this idea. One coach tried to create a climate on her team where participants felt safe enough to fail — and to succeed. She explained that the adolescents she has encountered often feel self-conscious and do not want to stand out in a group for negative *or* positive reasons. One of this coach’s goals, within Sole Train, was to change that. She discussed trying to cultivate a (positive, beneficial) sense of “who cares?” within her group. To her, this meant that she wanted her team members to feel that both succeeding and failing were natural things, and that there was no room on her team to judge anyone for either of those things.

Also, from the PI’s casual observation during the 5K, Sole Train did seem to feel safe to participants, as young people pushed beyond their (assumed) comfort levels at this event. Before the race started, two young people stood up and spoke about their Sole Train experiences on a microphone in front of the roughly 500 event attendees (including members of Sole Train, strangers from the community and members of the Boston Police Department). Another Young Sole stood in front of this large crowd and sang the national anthem. The PI viewed these things as examples of Young Soles taking risks with Sole Train (although, again, she can not guarantee that these young people may not have been comfortable public singers or speakers even before Sole Train). Perhaps these displays speak to Sole Train’s main goals, too; these young people may have been able to do these things, in part, because their Sole Train participation helped them realize that

they can succeed at even challenging tasks.

The Young Soles that the PI encountered at that event presented as being happy, poised, and brave. However, Sole Train participants, like most adolescents, may have to deal with complicated situations where they feel vulnerable in various parts of their lives. As was discussed in the introduction of this piece, Sole Train serves some young people who may be facing higher than usual levels of poverty and violence. Coaches discussed attempting to make Sole Train a place where participants knew that their emotional and physical safety would be protected. Therefore, portions of the coaches' interviews were coded as "physical/emotional safety."

One coach discussed the "nonsense" and "drama" (outside of Sole Train) that participants can "often get pulled into." She talked about how (she thought that) Young Soles liked that Sole Train was a place where they could be "free" of such things. Another coach highlighted a day when he faced an issue within his group that he viewed as threatening to the whole group's safety, and the safety of one individual. He described the situation, and how he eventually led a successful practice where both emotional and physical safety for all seemed restored. He said about this incident,

They [the Young Soles on his team] were just having off days and they kind of were, um, jabbing at one each other verbally and it, it erupted into a pretty large verbal argument that caused us to need to restrain one of our students because we were afraid of her hurting herself or one of her peers, so we ended up using a safety hold and bringing her to a different room and really processing with her

what she was feeling, what was going on, who said what to make her upset and, you know, in the matter of an hour and a half we were able to process her, bring the other individuals that were involved in the altercation together to have them sit in a circle and have them talk about how the individual's feelings impacted them and what harm was done, they were able to, um, make up, shake hands, and we were able to get them to go out and run around a little bit.

That coach went on to talk about how he was focused on the safety of the whole group and also that of the individual centrally involved in the incident. Rather than send that person home, or just send them off to deal with school administrators, the coach focused on kindness and communication in order to work through the issue with this young person. His description of this situation showed that he cared enough to take all necessary steps (including contacting the young person's parent) to make sure that the emotions and physical safety of all involved were protected. He said, about the rest of that situation,

It was really powerful because in the moment the school administration was worried about this lady to the point, she wanted to go home, we weren't even gonna' let her go home because we didn't know if she was going to end up hurting herself in some sort of way in getting home by herself, so we were able to calm her down, process through things with her, so she ended up staying and we made a positive phone call home that night letting her mother know what took



place but also sharing with her mom the progress she had made in that day to really communicate her feelings.

***Sub-theme 3: Created respectful groups.*** Throughout their interviews, coaches spoke about how they respected participants and their needs, and they spoke of the emphasis they placed on their Young Soles respecting one another. The code “notice and respect youth” was applied to statements that discussed how coaches went out of their way to make team members feel valued. Statements about coaches meeting participants “at their level(s)” and respecting their needs were also coded in this way.

Two of the coaches discussed trying to let team members know that an adult “saw them” and thought they were important to the group. One coach talked about how he would seek out participants during school hours on practice days just to check in, see if they were ready for Sole Train that day, and make sure that they would be at practice. Another coach described trying to be enthusiastic and upbeat while interacting with his team members. He mentioned seeing them and “giving [them] daps, giving [them] hugs, and pounding it out [with them].”

In terms of respecting how participants were feeling, one coach acknowledged that some kids had days where they may have felt less energized, less willing to communicate, or less excited to participate. The coach discussed trying strike a balance between not pushing participants too far emotionally on such days, and making sure that participants were still respectful to one another and the group. This coach handled situations like these with the approach of, “We’re all in this together, some of us may not

want to be in the [opening] circle right now and we're not forcing you to participate by sharing things out, but you will participate by being an active listener and being part of our circle.”

Another coach said that group communication was key to working together and to making every participant feel like a meaningful group member. This coach stated that when any one was having an “off day,” or when the group seemed to be lacking respect, they encouraged communication. This coach said, “If we weren't seeing that mutual respect in our opening circle we stopped and processed. You know, what's going on? Why, why are we feeling this way and how can we overcome this?”

Finally, another coach powerfully discussed the group that she worked with, and how important it was for her and the other Old Soles to be respectful of these young people. According to this coach, all of the participants at her site deal with (varying types of) “emotional disabilities.” She spoke in detail about her philosophy that it is the adults' responsibility to meet youth “where they are” on any given day (the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017) advised coaches to meet youth “where they are,” but focused on this in terms of allowing them to be where they need to be in terms of running. This coach spoke about meeting youth “where they are” emotionally).

This coach talked about having days when the Young Soles on her team were so “disregulated” that the practice was not going to unfold as planned. She explained that it was up to her, as the site coordinator, and the other adult volunteers, to try to create successful practices based on what the participants needed. She spoke of using tools like “conversations, intramurals, and different types of activities,” to allow the participants to

meet their goals in ways that felt appropriate for them. She also said that, to her, it seemed as though, “It’s that freedom of expression that I think gets the kids to come back and want to do more.”

This coach went on to highlight how changing practice plans and being flexible in order to treat participants with respect is not always easy for adults. She spoke of how meeting youth where they are can feel challenging, at times. She went on to talk about how she, as a coach, insisted that the youth, and their needs, remain the focus of all adults involved at all times. She provided an example of her feelings on the importance of respecting youth by saying,

It’s kind of a unique experience where you know we might run the Charles [River] and they [the Young Soles] want to stop and throw rocks and people [volunteer Old Soles] are like “no, we gotta...,” and I’m like, “this is what we do, we’re stopping, we’re throwing rocks, we’re... this is what they need to do, this is their outlet and we’re heading on back to school, so, so it’s challenging when there’s a lot of, you know, kids want to go their direction, and we want them to go in the other direction, and sometimes it’s just saying to folks, “You know what? We’re going with their direction today, it’s not really about us, it’s about *them* and what gets them to feel good in that moment.”

All four of the coaches also spoke about placing an emphasis on the young people on their teams treating one another with respect (the code “youth supporting youth” was

used when this idea came up). The coaches all expected their team members to show respect and support to their teammates (or any Sole Train participant). Sole Train requires that when Young Soles finish their own runs, they either run back and find someone who is still running to run with, or “cheer in” those still running or walking. The PI saw this in action during the 5K race; Sole Train participants turned around after crossing the race finish line and joined people still on the course, or they enthusiastically cheered on those who were finishing. McGonigal (2015) also witnessed this at the event she observed; she described watching some of the fastest Sole Train participants head back to the course and support other runners as they finished their races.

***Sub-theme 4: Supported youth.*** The Old Soles spoke about acting as supportive adults for their teams. The coaches discussed being aware of the power they held as the lead adult on their teams; one coach stated that he knew he could have a “humongous impact [on his team].” This is perhaps even truer in a group like Sole Train where some of the participants may have encountered adults in their lives who had not consistently been caring, dependable, forgiving or supportive. One coach said that one of his goals was to support [Young Soles] “outside of the classroom and also outside of their family.”

According to the Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017), coaches should, “Make sure Young Soles know that you believe they’re up for the challenge! Throughout the year it is crucial that we believe in these Young Soles, because if we do, they’ll believe back” (p. 12). The coaches in this piece spoke of doing this, and trying to support and guide Young Soles until they, too, understood their

capacity for great achievements. Parts of the Old Soles' interviews including this idea were labeled with the code "building I can mindsets."

One coach explained the importance of a coach believing that those on his team "could," and supporting them as they developed "I can mindsets" themselves. He said,

So the kids at [my school/site] have, um, traditionally been "I can't" kids. Kids who haven't fit into mainstream education, kids who haven't fit into substantially separate classrooms, and have really developed this cognition where school is a place where they "can't." It's where they can't be successful and where they can't make friends, where can't be their best selves. So something that I think is my overarching goal at Sole Train has always been to develop a culture of "I can." Um, because developing that kind of mind frame of "I can take a risk, I can trust an adult, I can do this half-mile, I can do this five-mile, I can go for run outside when it's ten degrees out." That kind of belief, that kind of self-esteem building and that kind of mindset, I've seen it be really...really help students kind of not only gain a greater confidence and a greater support system in the program, but also seen kids become much more involved in more community programs and also seen a benefit in academic performance and attendance, classroom culture, all that kind of stuff.

The coaches also often spoke of caring for their participants. Sections of data featuring these sentiments were labeled as "warm toward youth." When asked about how

they tried to act toward their team members, the coaches used words and phrases that included: kind, love (loving), respect (respectful), engaging, encouraging, “someone who keeps the door open, never shuts it,” enthusiastic, warm, understanding, and compassion (compassionate).

The coaches also discussed unique ways that they provided support to participants on the day of the Boston Run to Remember five-mile or half marathon race. According to coaches, race day can be overwhelming and produce anxiety for some young runners. There are many people running, many people cheering, and this was the event that participants’ training had all led up to. The coaches described supporting their team members by doing things like driving to their homes at 5:00 a.m. to pick them up for the race (as public transportation does not run this early), and running alongside youth (and encouraging them to keep going) during the race. Coaches discussed going above and beyond the duties of a traditional sports coach to ensure that participants felt supported and cared for on race day (and every day).

**Theme 2: Perceived psychological well-being changes.** The coaches spoke about trying to make Sole Train more than just a running group; rather, they wanted it to be a place where Young Soles really had the chance to thrive as people. According to the coaches, the youth that they worked with were able to just that at Sole Train — thrive. In fact, coaches described a range of positive changes they observed in participants over the course of program participation; many of these align with shifts in the dimensions of psychological well-being that Ryff (1989) described. Therefore, the theme “Perceived

psychological well-being changes” was developed.

This theme was developed based on the fact that this study attempted to look at Sole Train through the lens of Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being as being comprised of the six distinct dimensions of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. The theme became the heading for six sub-themes based on the six dimensions of psychological well-being that Ryff (1989) described. These are:

- Perceived self-acceptance changes: This sub-theme was based on codes connected to the Old Soles witnessing the Young Soles acting in ways that indicated they held positive views and feeling about themselves because of and during Sole Train.
- Perceived positive relations changes: This sub-theme was developed based on codes focused on the connections that coaches saw between participants, and between participants and Sole Train as a group.
- Perceived autonomy changes: This sub-theme was made up of codes related to coaches describing the ways that they saw youth become self-motivated leaders who could use Sole Train lessons in other areas of life.
- Perceived purpose in life changes: This sub-theme included codes connected to youth setting, working toward, and achieving goals.
- Perceived personal growth changes: This sub-theme was comprised of codes based on coaches describing the youth growing, changing and becoming more open.

- Perceived environmental mastery changes: This sub-theme contained codes based on youth navigating unfamiliar experiences.

***Sub-theme 1: Perceived self-acceptance changes.*** Self-acceptance, or “holding positive attitudes toward oneself,” is a “central feature of mental health” and one of the six dimensions that makes up psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). The Old Soles used terms like “self-esteem” and “confidence” when discussing what their participants developed during the program. They also talked about watching participants become proud of themselves and excited when they accomplished their goals. The codes “self-esteem/confidence” and “pride” were used to label sections of data where coaches spoke of perceiving Young Soles as “holding positive attitudes” (such as confidence and pride) toward themselves.

The coaches spoke of seeing Young Soles experience positive feelings toward themselves during programming. The coaches watched participants increase their self-esteem and confidence levels as they met running goals or connected with new people. They discussed witnessing Young Soles begin to believe in themselves as they internalized the improvements they were making, and they watched them begin to want to take on new challenges. One coach said that the program helped her Young Soles to “just become a little more sure of themselves in a way.”

Coaches also talked about Young Soles appearing proud of what they accomplished. To the coaches, Young Soles presented as being proud of even being a part of Sole Train (and of feeling pride when wearing Sole Train clothes or items that



linked them to the group). One coach described participants as coming to school and acting as though they were prouder and more self-assured because of Sole Train. One coach highlighted the idea that Sole Train increased participants' confidence and pride by saying, "I heard from teachers that, you know, every once in a while a kid would just kind of you know like brag like 'oh yeah, what we're doing [in school/class] is not that hard, I mean I ran five-miles yesterday.'"

Additionally, coaches discussed the impact that finishing Sole Train's final race (Boston's Run to Remember) had on participants. Finishing — particularly for participants who struggled to run in the past or who had not completed the race before — was powerful. According to the coaches this left participants feeling "incredibly proud."

***Sub-theme 2: Perceived positive relations changes.*** Ryff's (1989) definition of psychological well-being also included being able to build and maintain positive relationships with others. The idea of youth developing and taking part in positive, respectful relationships was frequently explored during the coach interviews. The coaches spoke often about urging their team members to encourage one another (an idea that was also explored in Theme 1, pertaining to caring climate). The coaches also discussed the bonds they saw forming among Sole Train members. Portions of data related to these bonds were coded as "strong connections within Sole Train."

The coaches acknowledged that there were "cliques" that did form within their groups at times. They tried to make it possible, though, for Young Soles to at least be exposed to one another and form some level of connections with young people that they may not have interacted with otherwise. One coach said that she did not want to

“manage” (or interfere in) friendships. She did, however, lead her group so that the atmosphere was conducive to positive relationships developing among all participants.

She said,

If you just remind everyone that they’re actually a team, I know running is usually an individual sport, you know but Sole Train is different, we run as a team, so you have to be part of that team and engage with all of your team members, you know, they all will at some point, it doesn’t, sometimes you have to force it a little bit, you have to make up games and make up running partnerships and, or sometimes you intentionally need to send a group of kids on a completely different route so they have to hang out together.

Another coach said that by the end of programming everyone was at least “an acquaintance,” and that there were some “really strong friendships” and “bonds” within his group (this is not to say that the program broke down “cliques,” but rather to say that coaches described their team members as all getting along, and as a place where new friendships did form and existing friendships were strengthened). He also went on to talk about how unique, special relationships can form among all involved in the program. He said, “[Friendships] may be Young Sole to Young Sole, Old Sole to Young Sole, Young Sole to Old Sole. It really depends on the individual but at the very least everyone had a mutual respect for each other and was able to get along at the very least.”

Regardless of the depth of the relationships that formed between team members, one coach said that their mission was to cultivate a positive atmosphere and help facilitate healthy connections. This coach said,

[I stressed that the youth] work collaboratively together, build a team, build a sense of family, support one another, and it's not about winning the race and being first, but it's more about the process and how they got there and the support that you got and gave throughout the journey.

The Old Soles indicated that they observed participants as being connected to Sole Train — both as a group of people and as a program. Statements related to this concept were coded as “youth as invested.” One Old Sole said that the majority of young people who began the program (approximately “eight out of ten” youth, according to this coach) ended up participating throughout the entire year and running the final race. Coaches also described participants subscribing to Sole Train’s behavioral standards, particularly those pertaining to the treatment of peers and coaches.

Other references to participants’ commitment to Sole Train were made, too. For instance, the coaches spoke of youth who went out of their way to attend Sole Train practices despite other after school obligations. They also talked about participants beginning the program as unsure, then actively engaging in the Sole Train process, and eventually growing to “love” the program and love running with their teammates. The Old Soles described watching participants want to be together, want to run together, and

want to come back to Sole Train year after year — some even return to visit or volunteer with Sole Train after they graduate, according to one coach.

***Sub-theme 3: Perceived autonomy changes.*** Ryff described autonomy as “the process of turning inward,” and “the regulation of behavior from within” (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). According to their interviews, coaches saw their Young Soles “step up” during Sole Train. The coaches’ versions of “stepping up” included witnessing participants begin to motivate themselves and develop into positive leaders. Finally, coaches saw Young Soles take the lessons they were learning at Sole Train, internalize what those could look like in other areas of their lives, and begin to transfer the skills.

The coaches discussed watching Young Soles mature during Sole Train. In fact, they referenced seeing their participants become self-directed, rather than looking to others to motivate them (these types of data were coded as “self-directed”). A coach described watching Young Soles come to take Sole Train “seriously.” She saw participants set their minds to running certain distances or tackling certain challenges and then pushing themselves to meet these goals.

Coaches also talked about watching their runners grow “more comfortable pushing their boundaries,” and watching participants give themselves “little pep talks” when tasks seemed tough. Another coach talked about participants becoming more “intrinsically motivated” to run by the end of programming. He appreciated watching his members of his group choose to run together even after the program’s final race was over.

The coaches also spoke of Sole Train's impact on participants' actions toward others. On a number of occasions throughout the interviews coaches discussed the leadership that they witnessed from Young Soles (these instances were coded as "leadership"). While leadership alone is not one of Ryff's (1989) dimensions of psychological well-being, it can be connected to the idea of autonomy; according to Hellison et al. (2010), leadership skills are often developed in sport settings when participants have "looked inward" and feel empowered enough to help and influence others.

One coach mentioned that Sole Train helped participants "enhance" leadership skills. Another coach said, in regards to the leadership she saw from team members,

We have kids step up every day, whether it's something minor like, "Oh, I have the question that we're gonna' start with today" [at the beginning of practice], or you know whether it's something like, "Oh, this person is running and is not feeling well and is kind of miserable, I'm gonna' stop running and walk with them." There's, you know, leadership, especially for teenagers, often comes in in really small doses, and it just happens all the time [at Sole Train].

The coaches all discussed seeing positive changes within their group members: in their attitudes toward themselves, their interactions with others, and in their abilities to apply the lessons from Sole Train to other areas of their lives (such as at home, at school, in friendships, in jobs, etc.). The code "transfer" was used to label portions across all

four of the coach interviews that featured this concept. First, the coaches acknowledged the potential that Sole Train had to positively impact Young Soles' lives outside of the program. One coach said, "I just instantly recognized that this [Sole Train] was a program that would be vital to students' social-emotional development and growth and also could be a humongous supplementary need to their academic success."

Next, the coaches spoke of realizing that part of their jobs was to help participants understand that Sole Train skills were applicable to life generally. The coaches were correct in their assessment of transfer as a key element of Sole Train. According to Theokas et al. (2010), "the ability to transfer skills learned in sports to other domains is perhaps the most crucial step in [young people] achieving the maximum outcome from participation in sports" (pp. 72–73). One coach spoke of how she tried to focus on the idea of transfer while coaching. She said, "Constantly we try to make that connection and that link between being out here in Sole Train and then taking that back to the classroom and the academics and the challenges that you face and even into the work force for our older kids."

Although the coaches did stress the importance of encouraging transfer, they also talked about seeing participants "naturally" begin to use lessons from Sole Train in other areas of their lives. One coach described how she perceived Sole Train as having broadened participants' thinking. According to this coach, participants began to understand (during and through Sole Train participation) that they were capable and worthy; this led to them considering other areas of their lives where they could become better versions of themselves. She said,

And then they're [participants are] like, "And then I want to do this, and I want to try this." And, you know, now they're like, "Now when I go home I walk and I make sure that I exercise, and, you know, I'm really trying to think about what I eat and the stuff that I put into my body." It just it all starts to fall into place for them.

***Sub-theme 4: Perceived purpose in life changes.*** One of Sole Train's main goals is to "deconstruct" the idea that success is impossible for the youth they aim to serve (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 4). Sole Train tries to do this by allowing participants to see that they can accomplish a tough goal — finishing a race. When Ryff (1989) described the dimension of purpose of life, she talked about people needing to be able to set and achieve goals in order to live their best lives. Goal setting and goal achievement were two ideas covered in coach interviews. The coaches perceived Young Soles as becoming better able to set and meet goals over the course of Sole Train, and they discussed the importance of encouraging participants to do these things.

Portions of data where coaches spoke of participants establishing or meeting important goals were coded as "setting and achieving goals." According to one coach, a particularly influential part of Sole Train is that participants are constantly setting their own goals (including both short and long term running goals). They are also achieving "unimaginable" goals (or goals participants never considered before), according to the coach. These unimaginable goals include finishing the Run to Remember — one coach

said that all of her participants who crossed the starting line did finish the 2016 race (either the five-mile race or the half marathon). The coaches often spoke about the importance of Young Soles actually finishing the race. Therefore, the code, “had to do the “hard thing”” was used to label portions of data where coaches spoke of the value of completing the final race.

The coaches explained that the process of being involved at Sole Train throughout the year (including showing up for practices, being an active participant, connecting with others) was important. However, the coaches really emphasized the need for Young Soles to follow through and complete the end of the year race (or the “hard thing”). When the Old Soles were asked how important it was to them that their Young Soles actually finished the final race (as opposed to simply being involved throughout the year), three of the four coaches stated that completing the final race was “extremely important” (while one described it as “somewhat important”). One coach said, “I would say a lot of emphasis was on finishing [the end race] and it didn’t matter how you finished, or what time you finished in, it was just the fact that you finished.”

In order to get participants to achieve the goal of finishing the final race, coaches had to train participants to be capable runners who were able to work hard and meet a tough goal. One coach spoke about how she kept her Young Soles focused and working toward the completion of the final race or the “hard thing.” She said,

You know, I mean, it’s a long season so you kind of always have to be dangling that carrot in front of ‘em. You know, and like, “You give up in the winter it’s



gonna' be so much harder for the big race," so there's always, I think it's almost like an inverted relationship between the two, so you start out the year really emphasizing the process and just kind of reminding them about the race, and as the year goes on you focus less about the process and more on the race because at that point it's becoming more and more real and that's the motivating factor.

Another coach talked about pushing participants by putting an "emphasis on running" and on achieving the "ultimate goal," so that they actually did follow through and meet their major Sole Train goal. It was so important to the coaches that participants completed that goal, and learned about commitment, work, and their own strength along the way. The coaches focused on these things so that participants could ideally understand that other goals [in all areas of life] could be attainable with the right training and effort.

***Sub-theme 5: Perceived personal growth changes.*** According to Ryff (1989), personal growth occurs when one's potential develops and when one "expands as a person" (p. 1071). The Old Soles spoke both about witnessing the Young Soles "expanding," both on their own terms and because, at times, the coaches would gently "nudge" participants toward growth. The coaches discussed encouraging the Young Soles to push themselves physically, but also to be more introspective and in touch with their thoughts, feelings, and actions than they may have been in the past.

For this reason, some sections of the data were coded as "encouraging

introspection.” Coaches spoke of trying to facilitate positive shifts within young people by prompting them to think critically and reflect during practices. The Old Soles provided examples of having their teams think deeply about why issues may be occurring between team members, about how their bodies were moving and serving them during practices, and about even more complex subjects like gratitude and what that might look like in their lives.

The coaches spoke both broadly and specifically about the growth that they perceived among participants. On a number of occasions coaches made broad comments about how beneficial Sole Train was for participants. Coaches said things like they saw “a ton of progress [in participants].” They made comments about how much participants grew and the amount of “socio-emotional growth” they observed. One coach discussed watching a particular young person mature and develop a more positive attitude toward others, particularly teachers. Comments such as these were coded as “positive changes in participants.”

More specifically, coaches discussed watching participants open up as part of the program. The code “opened up” was used to label sections of data where coaches described participants opening up (personally) and becoming more open to new experiences. Ryff (1989) described the ability to be open as being necessary for “the fully functioning person” (p. 1071). One coach saw their team members become more open and eventually grow comfortable enough to talk about their families and their hopes and plans for their futures. Another coach discussed how his team members opened up by saying,

Another amazing thing that kind of encapsulates the story of Sole Train in my eyes is that we had a lot of introverts on our team in the beginning of the year, um, individuals that do not like being in a group setting, kind of shy away from participating and sharing about their personal lives due to past experiences that may have been trauma-induced. And some of these individuals who were very reluctant to share in the beginning of the year ended up leading our opening circles as well as our stretches and our closing circles and even leading the Sole Train cheer at the end of the year.

***Sub-theme 6: Perceived environmental mastery changes.*** Ryff defined environmental mastery as “the individual’s ability to choose or create an environment suitable to his or her psychic conditions,” and said that this dimension involves “taking advantage of opportunities” and “active participation” in “complex environments” (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). It could be argued that by even choosing to participate in Sole Train, a young person is accepting to be part of, and work through, a new opportunity. The coaches discussed watching Young Soles navigate through unfamiliar and challenging situations as part of the group, too.

Only one code, the code “new experience,” came up related to the idea of (coaches perceiving) participants as increasing their levels of environmental mastery with Sole Train. This code was applied to sections of data where coaches described how Young Soles handled the day of Boston’s Run to Remember Race. They talked about how “overwhelming,” crowded, early, and busy race day was. One coach described the

“risk” that participants took by being part of the event and attempting to finish a distance race in front of so many strangers. However, according to the coaches, participants got to the race, fought through the anxiety that it caused for some, and ended up both finishing the race and getting to “experience Boston in a new way” through the race.

As with all of the other sub-themes related to shifts that coaches described in Young Soles, it cannot be definitively stated that Young Soles were able to successfully navigate through race day because of Sole Train participation. However, as with the rest of the sub-themes, the coaches described witnessing participants act in ways throughout program that indicated that shifts were occurring related to their six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). In the case of environmental mastery, the Old Soles discussed watching Young Soles tackle race day and try to manage themselves under new, atypical circumstances.

**Theme 3: Old Soles positively impacted.** All of the four coaches spoke about overcoming adversity within their coach roles, personal learning, and being moved (sometimes to tears) by their times with Sole Train and those they encountered along the way. The coaches described their experiences with Sole Train in terms ranging from “extremely positive” to “life changing.” Therefore the theme, “Old Soles positively impacted” was developed (meaning that coaches were positively impacted by their time and involvement with Sole Train). The following sub-themes made up this third theme:

- Worked through challenges: This sub-theme was developed based on codes connected to coaches’ challenges within Sole Train and how they handled these.

- Experienced personal or professional growth: This sub-theme contained codes related to the ways coaches grew and changed as people, and the ways they developed professionally.
- Surprised or moved by participants: This sub-theme was based on codes connected to coaches being surprised and impressed by youth participants, and about being emotionally impacted by coaching.

*Sub-theme 1: Worked through challenges.* Each of the Old Soles discussed having positive overall experiences with Sole Train. One coach even described the group as “magical” and as “one of [her] favorite things” (portions of interviews where coaches spoke in a generally positive way about Sole Train were coded as “positive experience for coaches.”) However, the Old Soles were candid about their time with the program occasionally presenting them with challenges. The coaches also spoke about how they worked through the difficulties that arose during coaching.

One coach spoke frankly about the administrative challenges that came along with her role as a Sole Train coach. She stated that at times coaching felt time-consuming and that administrative duties like collecting forms and managing Young Sole attendance were not necessarily the best aspects of the role for her. Sections of data pertaining to these types of issues were coded as “every day challenges,” while the code “difficult days” was applied to sections of data that spoke about particularly tough days for coaches. This coach said of an “every day” type of challenge,

You know, sometimes you kind of get, the minutia of it, like, attendance, which I'm terrible at, and you know, like getting forms turned back and calling parents and you know all that stuff that I'm already doing as a teacher, I just want to go running, you know, like sometimes when you're knee deep in that kind of stuff it's not necessarily enjoyable.

However, this coach was able to get past these more mundane duties by acknowledging that the best parts of her role — like witnessing young people succeed — far outweighed the tougher parts. She said, “And every year I find that it's just worth it; it's worth the hours, you know, that you put in.”

This coach also spoke about a daunting day when she had a particularly large group of Young Soles to manage with little adult assistance. She spoke about asking the Young Soles to act as leaders to help practice run smoothly. They were able to do this, and this day gave the Young Soles the opportunity to put lessons about leadership learned at Sole Train into effect.

The coaches also spoke about the challenges of leading running groups during inclement weather or on chaotic days, like on race day. The coaches acknowledged that they, too, are people, and that bad weather and anxiety-provoking situations could be problematic for them, not just the kids. The coaches discussed working through times like these by acting upbeat and trying to make even tough situations fun and exciting. They essentially spoke of leading by example so that the Young Soles could effectively deal with challenges, too.

Despite the challenges discussed, each coach spoke of being deeply loyal to Sole Train. Therefore, portions of the data were labeled “loyal.” Each coach interviewed plans to stay on as a coach in the future. One coach stated that they try to get “a little more involved” each year that they coach Sole Train, and that they cannot picture themselves not being involved in Sole Train. When asked to summarize his feelings on the group, another coach said, “[The] feeling is loyalty. I’m super loyal to Sole Train, super loyal to [the head of Sole Train], anything that they ever needed from me or had asked from me, you know I’ve done.”

***Sub-theme 2: Experienced personal or professional growth.*** The Old Soles’ main task at Sole Train is to guide and support the Young Soles as they change, grow, and develop “I can” mindsets. The Old Soles interviewed, though, spoke about how Sole Train helped *them* to change, grow, and learn things about themselves. First, each coach talked a bit within their interviews about where they had come from and why they became involved in Sole Train. All started out in roles connected to serving others, particularly young people. Portions of data that reflected prior work with young people, or becoming involved with coaching in order to help young people, were coded as “youth focused backgrounds.” While this sub-theme is more focused on what coaches got from Sole Train, the code “youth focused backgrounds” was included here because it does connect to the coaches’ professional lives. It also speaks to the fact that the coaches may have come into the program with mindsets and experiences that allowed them to really invest in Sole Train and ideally benefit from involvement.

One coach who, like the others, started out with a “youth focused background” and a desire to be a part of a group that had the potential to serve adolescents, discussed what he gained from Sole Train involvement — both personally and professionally. Personally, he stated that being involved with Sole Train gave him, “A stronger sense of who I am.” He went on to describe professional opportunities he’s had due to Sole Train. Statements connected to coaches’ professional development were coded as “professional growth.” About his professional development because of Sole Train, one coach said,

Sole Train has been an amazing platform for me to develop professional skills; to develop leadership skills, to develop supervisory skills, to represent the organization externally (which I’ve done a number of times), um, public speaking skills as well, speaking on behalf of the organization in front of donors, in front of the board at Trinity [the Trinity Boston Foundation].

Another coach spoke about gaining a better understanding of young people, and particularly the young people she worked with in a professional capacity (as part of her “day job”) because of coaching Sole Train. In her professional role she encounters young people at school and may have to act as more of an authority figure, at times. However, getting to know her team members outside of school helped her relax and actually connect with youth in a different way.

The code “learned about self” was also used, as the Old Soles discussed realizing things about themselves because of their Sole Train involvement. For instance, one



coach described learning more about how she views running, exercise, and relationships with others. She came to recognize that she is no longer interested in running in pursuit of a specific running time or a particular running accomplishment of her own. Rather, she enjoys using running as a way to help or connect with others. She said,

The more I do Sole Train, the more I actually have stopped doing, running marathons for myself, and you know, really now I just want to run with other people and help them achieve their goals, you know, even if it means you know I'll never get the half marathon time or the marathon time I set out for myself. I guess I care a whole lot less about that because of my experience with Sole Train.

***Sub-theme 3: Surprised or moved by participants.*** Each of the four coaches shared at least one story about a specific Young Sole that profoundly impacted them. Some of the Young Soles surprised them. Others impressed them with either their athletic abilities, their commitment to the program, or their perseverance. Watching the Young Soles meet goals they may not have initially thought possible was incredibly powerful for the Old Soles. The code “surprised/impressed by Young Soles’ athletic abilities or progress” labeled sections of data containing these ideas.

One coach provided an example of Young Sole who surprised and impressed her on race day. She said,

Yeah, I ran with this boy, um, who was in the seventh grade and um, I, you know,

I had him all year and he ran a little bit, he walked, he certainly is a social kid but he's quiet, and um, he didn't come to like the 5K or some of the events because he was really nervous and anxious and, um, I said, "Listen, I really want you to go to this, to the um, the Run to Remember because you're going to get your hoodie and you deserve it." And he went, I picked him up, and he ran with me and I'm telling you this kid blew me out of the water.

She went on to talk more about this individual. She said,

And we're at like probably two miles or three miles and he says "How much longer do we have?" and I said "Well listen, you're doing awesome, I think we have like two miles left" and he goes, "When are you gonna' start running?" And I was like "You are kidding me." In my head I was like "You are kidding me." It was like amazing, like what, and I'm like, "Alright let's go!" and he's like, "Are you ready?" And I'm like, "Ready?! I've been running the whole way!" So I'm like, "Okay, let's go!" He ran the last two miles like no, like I have been doing this all my life, and he comes across the finish line and he goes, "Can we do the half [marathon] next year?" I'm like, "Yeah! Absolutely!"

Another coach witnessed a girl on her Sole Train team challenge herself in front of athletic male teammates, surprising herself, the coach, and her peers in a positive way. The coach described how this young person, who typically stayed with a group that ran

more slowly, asked to join some really fast boys and this coach during a long run Saturday practice. The coach felt unsure if this girl could keep up. She described the situation by saying,

This little girl who maybe weighs 75 pounds soaking wet, like, just crushed the rest of the run. You know, she like, at the end of it I just remember like the boys looking at her going, “Dude, you’re incredible.” You know, and it was it was this really cool moment you know where like, she was just really determined to do something and so she did and, you know, and she surprised herself and surprised everyone around her, you know, and felt awesome about that.

This example showed that this girl took a risk in a safe space and succeeded. Her success was met with support and respect from peers that she may not have connected with in any other setting. The coach shared that story when asked to discuss her best day at Sole Train for the 2015–2016 season.

The coaches also talked about feeling moved or “emotionally impacted” (the code used for this idea) when they saw youth succeed. One coach watched a Young Sole make incredible athletic and emotional progress over the course of the Sole Train program. She said,

There was, um, one girl, um, who is very overweight, and really low self-esteem and very self-conscious of, um, not being able to keep up and keep the pace with

other kids, and so I started to walk with her, um, and we would kind of play games together, um, trying to run between, um, signs, so “from this sign to this sign we’re going to jog and run a little,” but and through that experience she, um, actually did the entire five miles. She walked [and] ran the entire five miles for the Run to Remember.

The coach spoke of the fact that this girl was not only proud of herself for finishing, but that the coach was incredibly proud, too. The coach talked about the “happy tears” she shed watching this girl succeed. She also described witnessing this accomplishment as “amazing,” and talked about instances like this as making her job worth the “blood, sweat and tears” she felt she put into it.

The emotion that coaches felt when Young Soles reached goals also came through in the following statement made by a coach:

When I ended up crossing the finish line at the Run to Remember with one of our Young Soles I almost couldn’t finish because I started hyperventilating because I was so filled with emotion on, you know, what this meant to her, how far she had come throughout the year.

Another coach described incidents like these as making the value of their role as a Sole Train coach clear. This coach said that things like this are, “Why I do what I do.”

### **Results from Young Sole Interviews**

Four main themes emerged from the five interviews conducted with the Young Soles. The four major themes are: “Experienced a caring climate,” “Psychological well-being shifts occurred,” “Sole Train as positive experience,” and “Became runners.” See Table 8 for a breakdown of these four primary themes and the sub-themes and codes that comprise them. These are discussed in detail in the following section.

**Table 8: Young Sole Results**

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Experienced a caring climate	Supportive adults	- Adults as motivating - Adults as caring - Adults as positive - Adults as inspirational - Adults as friends/mutual respect
	Positive atmosphere	- Family/part of something - Encouraging, not competitive - Fun/happy climate
Psychological well-being shifts occurred	Increased self-acceptance	- Confidence - Pride
	Developed positive relations with others	- *Joined because of friends - Improved existing friendships - Formed friendships/met new people - Friends supported each other - Bonding
	Greater senses of autonomy	- Meeting goals important - Self-directed
	Developed purpose in life	- Recognized ability to persevere/reach bigger goals
	Described personal growth	- Looking to improve - Did it for me/sounded fun - Opened them up
Sole Train as positive experience	Demonstrated environmental mastery	- Navigating new experiences
	Worked through challenges	- External factors - Unsure early on
	Connected to program	- General positive feedback - **Made an effort to return - Returned because of people
	Race day was powerful	- Overwhelmed/excited - Exhilarated at finish
Became runners	New relationship with running	- ***Did not identify as runners - Running as fun - Saw themselves as runners
	Experienced physical benefits	- Recognized running progress - ****Noted pace or mileage

*Note:* \*The code about joining because of friends is explained in the section on relationships. \*\*Differences exist between “Made an effort to return” and “Returned because of the people” (explained in section on “Connected to the Program”). \*\*\*Youth identified as runners over time (explained in the section on “New relationship with running”). \*\*\*\*Youth described their pace and mileage in a positive way (explained in the section, “Experienced physical benefits”).

**Theme 1: Experienced a caring climate.** The Young Soles indicated that they perceived their Sole Train teams as having caring climates. Each of the five youth interviewed spoke in detail about the caring and inspirational adults as their sites, as well as the importance of the peers and friends who trained along with them. All interviewees identified their sites as having positive atmospheres featuring good relationships among all involved. Therefore, the first major theme that emerged from the youth interviews was that, in fact, they “Experienced a caring climate.” Two sub-themes emerged within this major theme:

- Supportive adults: This sub-theme was based on codes related to the positive descriptions that youth gave of Sole Train coaches and their interactions with them.
- Positive atmosphere: This sub-theme was created based on grouping codes related to collegiality among Sole Train participants and the general positive tone that participants described the group as having.

***Sub-theme 1: Supportive adults.*** Each of the five interviewees spoke highly about the adults that they worked with at Sole Train. General statements that the Young Soles made about the positive influences of the Sole Train adults were coded as “adults as positive.” The Young Soles also provided more specific descriptions of the impact of the Old Soles. Both the Site Coordinators and the adult volunteers who regularly worked with participants were described as (among other terms) “caring,” “kind,” “positive,” and “inspirational.”

The code “adults as motivating” was used to label statements that Young Soles made about how adults helped them to persevere. Young Soles discussed how the adults used both their words and actions to motivate them; the adults made up interesting games during practices, cheered them on during runs, and ran along with them when they needed a boost. One Young Sole expressed that the beginning of Sole Train felt difficult for her (as it was a new experience and she was unsure of how she would do). She also described how important the encouragement was from all of the adults at Sole Train, including the leaders of the entire program. She said, about overcoming the challenging beginning of the program, “So it like took, like, a lot of encouragement and I was like always doubting myself but, um, it was like with all the staff and the support it was easy to like keep pulling through.”

The adults at Sole Train made an impact on those interviewed by helping them through challenging runs or difficult days by being fun and funny, and by encouraging them to be supportive of each other. The adults also influenced the Young Soles by simply being themselves; these young people saw the Old Soles as examples of great runners and hard workers. In fact, one Young Sole shared a story of being inspired by an Old Sole who trained for extremely long races (200 miles, according to the Young Sole), and who could do any type of run that the Young Sole wanted to do at any given practice. The PI coded sections where the Young Soles spoke about how the Old Soles inspired them as “adults as inspirational.”

The code “adults as caring” came up in the data, as well. Young Soles spoke of coaches “caring about them individually,” trying to ensure that “nothing bad” happened



to them, and as being “nice” and consistently present. One Young Sole said that the feeling that they got from coaches was, “So nice, and just all of the adults, they all cared [about Young Soles and their success].”

The Young Soles interviewed discussed feeling close to the adults at Sole Train, too. Sections of interview data that included ideas about a mutual respect and even friendship between adults and young people at Sole Train were coded as “adults as friends/mutual respect.” One Young Sole stated that the adults at Sole Train were “relatable.” Another Young Sole said, “They [the Old Soles at his site] were, they became really good friends with me and I was their friend, too, uh, by the end of the year.” Sentiments like these indicated that the youth experienced Sole Train as having a caring climate, or as a place where “kids are treated with respect,” and “leaders respect kids,” and that these feelings were reciprocated by the youth (Newton, et al., 2007, p. 78).

***Sub-theme 2: Positive atmosphere.*** When the Old Soles were interviewed, the idea that the Sole Train groups could feel like “families” was brought up. This idea came up again within the youth interviews (portions of Young Sole data containing this idea were coded as “family/part of something”). All five youth interviewed described the general atmosphere (the tone at practices and races, the relationships among all involved, the overall “feeling” of being a part of Sole Train) as extremely positive. In regards to the atmosphere at Sole Train, one Young Sole stated, “At first we [Sole Train participants] were all kind of shy toward each other, we didn’t know each other, it would

be like our first time with each other, but as it continued, we all just kind of like grew as a family, like we all felt comfortable around each other.”

All interviewees also described Sole Train as a group that was encouraging rather than competitive. Sections of data focused on Sole Train’s encouraging atmosphere were coded as “encouraging/not competitive.” McGonigal (2015) also observed Sole Train as being about working with, rather than against, one another. The group resonated with interviewees in this study as a place where individuals lifted each other up, and went out of their way to cheer each other on. One Young Sole described how he was “always” given encouragement. Another Young Sole spoke of her coaches reminding her to turn around and run with slower runners to help them finish. This Young Sole also said, “And we all need to like help each other finish through, ‘cause like with Sole Train we don’t race against each other, we, we like we help each other, so it’s never a race between any two peers, and we have to help each other.”

Helping, treating others fairly, and making one another feel accepted and welcome are important parts of a caring climate. The interviewees’ descriptions of their time with Sole Train suggested that they were experiencing these things. The climate at Sole Train seemed to be created by the adult leaders, but was also fostered and perpetuated by the youth participants valuing one another and treating one another respectfully.

Sole Train is attempting to help youth reach “seemingly impossible goals,” and putting them through serious physical training (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 4). However, the youth interviewed in this study

repeatedly described Sole Train as fun and as a group that just made them happy. The code “fun/happy climate” labeled parts of Young Soles’ interviews related to this idea.

Young Soles described Sole Train as having an “energetic” atmosphere, where people got along, “nothing really bad happened,” and where they were challenged, but not pushed beyond their capabilities. The young people often brought up the laughter that occurred during practices and races. One Young Sole even said that on a Tuesday or Thursday (practice days), he’d “probably be really happy” knowing that he’d be taking part in Sole Train that day.

**Theme 2: Psychological well-being shifts occurred.** All five Young Soles described ways that they changed, grew, and developed as a part of Sole Train. Specifically, these young people discussed feeling good about themselves because of their Sole Train accomplishments. They also talked about things like forming or deepening friendships, experiencing feelings of independence, and becoming more open because of the program. Therefore, the theme, “Psychological well-being shifts occurred,” was developed. The following sub-themes, based on the six of the dimensions that comprise Ryff’s (1989) psychological well-being definition, made up this theme:

- Increased self-acceptance: This sub-theme included codes pertaining to youth’s positive feelings about themselves.
- Developed positive relations with others: This sub-theme was developed based on codes focused on friendships and relationships within Sole Train.
- Greater senses of autonomy: This sub-theme was comprised of codes connected

to youth describing feeling self-motivated and driven because of Sole Train.

- Developed purpose in life: This sub-theme was created based on codes related to participants' goals.
- Described personal growth: This sub-theme was developed by grouping codes that focused on youth changing and becoming more open over the course of Sole Train.
- Demonstrated environmental mastery: This sub-theme contained codes related to youth dealing with new challenges.

***Sub-theme 1: Increased self-acceptance.*** According to Ryff (1989), accepting oneself and feeling good about oneself are vital to being psychologically well. According to the Young Soles interviewed for this piece, Sole Train helped them to experience positive feelings about themselves. Specifically, the Young Soles used terms like “confident” and “proud” when describing how the program made them feel. Four out of the five interviewees had portions of their interview data coded as “confidence.” These Young Soles discussed times when Sole Train made them feel confident, prepared, and able to achieve their goals.

Sole Train is designed to build participants' confidence by not just telling them that they can achieve lofty goals, but by training them to do so, and then allowing them to actually experience this at the final five-mile race or half marathon. One Young Sole stated that his confidence increased with the group because, according to him, “[Sole Train] gives you the mindset of like, you know you're able to do it [run/achieve goals],

um, because you've done it before.”

Another Young Sole said that on race day, she drew upon the confidence that Sole Train had given her during training. She said that although the race seemed daunting and overwhelming, she felt confident because she knew that, “I've trained for this, I can do this.” Finally, one Young Sole summed up the connection between Sole Train participation and increased confidence in participants. She said, “Sole Train just kind of put a different mindset in my head that I can do anything.”

The self-acceptance that participants experienced with Sole Train also came through as they described feeling proud of themselves and their accomplishments with the group (“pride” was the code used in these instances). One Young Sole said that his time with Sole Train was not just fun, but it also made him really proud of himself; another discussed experiencing pride after realizing that they had made it through a particularly “miserable” run. Another interviewee spoke to the idea that Sole Train helped participants think deeply about who they are, where they started, and how far they went with the program — and to feel good about that. This Young Sole said, “And even though I'm not the best runner, I'm still really proud, and running the half marathon was one of my accomplishments, it's like my first really big accomplishment that I just had to go, ‘Wow, I can't believe I did that.’”

***Sub-theme 2: Developed positive relations with others.*** According to Ryff (1989), in order to function optimally, individuals must be able to form and maintain warm, trusting relationships with others. They should also be able to get close to, and

work well with, others. The youth interviewed as part of this study talked about forming relationships with others because of Sole Train, and about strengthening and enjoying existing friendships because of participating in Sole Train with friends.

Four out of the five interviewees joined Sole Train because their friends were joining; the fifth interviewee joined with the idea that making new friends through the program was probable. The code “joined because of friends” was used in these instances. The PI is aware that this code does not necessarily connect with Sole Train participation enhancing the psychological well-being dimension of positive relations with others. However, this code is included in this section (on relationships) as it demonstrates that relationships were important to the Sole Train experience from the very beginning for some participants.

Two other codes, “improved existing friendships,” and “formed friendships/met new people [through Sole Train]” were used to label sections of data where Young Soles brought up relationships that began and developed because of Sole Train. Whether friendships were established at Sole Train, or simply deepened because of the program, all five interviewees described friends as instrumental to Sole Train being a special experience.

Some of the interviewees discussed viewing Sole Train as a place to better themselves while having a great time with their friends. They talked excitedly about running with their friends during regular practices, “long run” practices, and on race day, and about how their friends made the runs fun and interesting. Sections that described the fun and bonding between friends at Sole Train were coded as “bonding.” One Young

Sole shared a memory about bonding and feeling close with his Sole Train friends on race day, as they challenged themselves and completed the half marathon. He said,

So one of the best things was at the water fountains what we [his group of friends] would do is we would each take a cup, and then like we would say like countdown like, “Three, two, one,” as were running with the water in our hands, and then just like throw it over our heads. And then once we did that we would just start running. Our heads were like soaked by the end, partly from sweat but mostly from like splashing water on our faces. But then that just got us like really motivated like every time we did that and we’d start like yelling to each other like “Sole Train!”

Interviewees discussed receiving support and motivation from friends, as well. The Young Soles talked about how they and their friends “stuck together” through days at Sole Train that felt particularly challenging. According to Ryff (1989), having truly positive relations with others means feeling a sense of closeness (or intimacy) with others, while also being able to take guidance or direction from them. Four out of the five interviewees in this study discussed instances where they needed or felt real support or guidance from other young people at the program.

The Young Soles talked about how when one person needed to slow down or walk, often the whole group of friends would do so (“friends supported each other” was the code that labeled such sections of data). One Young Sole described how his friend

helped him not only persevere, but actually have fun, on a day when the weather was bad. He said, “I, well I was with one of my friends, and he kept making me laugh, so by the end even though I was kind of shaking cold he just kind of made me happy and made me laugh.”

***Sub-theme 3: Greater senses of autonomy.*** Sole Train is a team that is designed, in part, to help young people work well with adults and other youth. It is also meant to help participants learn more about who they are and to become independent and self-motivated. Sole Train functions as a team, so there is support available to the participants. However, Sole Train is also running-based, meaning that participants are engaging in an individual sport and must often look within themselves to really be successful. No one can force a young person to run, and with no other team members depending on anyone else’s performances, it is up to each Sole Train participant to decide how far (literally and figuratively) he or she can go.

Ryff (1989) described autonomy as being driven from within, or as being able to make one’s own decisions and act in accordance to what feels right to the individual. Four out of the five interviewees discussed how important it was to them to meet their own Sole Train goals. The code “meeting goals important” was applied to sections of data where this idea was brought up. Interviewees talked about feeling as though completing the race at the end of training was a major part of the Sole Train experience. One Young Sole touched on how important completing the race felt to her; she said,



Last year I really wanted to run, I wanted to run the race, so even though I saw people stopping and [I] really wanted to stop, the hardest part was just I knew I could stop I knew I could walk, but having the mindset of, “No, you have to run this race, it’s your third year in Sole Train, finish the five-mile.” That was the only thing on my mind, but my body just wanted to stop.

While the Young Soles were guided, coached, and supported by adults, they were also given enough space and flexibility, at times, to feel ownership over their Sole Train experiences. The runners talked about being able to self-direct their practices, and to push themselves as much or as little as they felt like doing on most days (the code “self-directed” was used in these instances). They talked about being free enough to have fun and explore (whether this meant making up games with friends or checking out the actual areas they were running) during practices and runs, while still managing to be focused and put in the necessary training.

***Sub-theme 4: Developed purpose in life.*** The dimension of purpose in life focused on people setting goals and having a sense of direction that allows them to reach these goals (Ryff, 1989). All five interviewees discussed recognizing that they could set and reach bigger goals in the future because of Sole Train. Participating in the program also gave them a better understanding of how to go about reaching their goals. Sections of interview data related to these ideas were coded as “recognized ability to persevere/reach bigger goals.”

One Young Sole explained that Sole Train taught him that with practice, training, and breaking goals down in a manageable way, that he could achieve anything. Another stated that completing a half marathon made him see that he can “accomplish more.” A Young Sole said that the idea of running a full marathon is now something that he’s contemplating because of his accomplishments with Sole Train. Interviewees reported feeling as though they can take risks, try harder, and break free from their comfort zones because they were able to do so with Sole Train, and they realize that they can do these things in other areas of life. One Young Sole summed up this idea by saying,

I think it helped me...helped me realize that I don't, even if I'm not good at something at first I can still get better, uh, it helped me realize that...if you try hard enough you can accomplish something and that even if at times things seem unbearable there's...always an end to that...it made me feel like I could accomplish things that if you'd asked me before I'd never thought I'd be able to do.

***Sub-theme 5: Described personal growth.*** Interviewees gave a range of responses when asked why they initially joined Sole Train. Some provided reasons — focused around self-improvement — for wanting to join the group. Young Soles spoke of hoping to improve physically or socially (the code used in these instances was “looking to improve”), while other responses centered around the idea that joining would be a fun or rewarding experience (the code used in these cases was “did it for me/sounded fun”). These are broad ideas. They indicate, though, that all interviewees were looking

to gain something from participation and were in some way open to experiencing personal growth.

The Young Soles' saw themselves change and improve physically with Sole Train. They also developed more complex relationships with adults and peers, and they achieved running goals. Additionally, interviewees described becoming more open over the course of Sole Train (the code "opened them up" labeled sections where youth discussed this type of growth). Ryff (1989) explained that being open to new people and life experiences, and taking on new challenges (which are parts of personal growth), are key to optimal functioning. One Young Sole described having her mind opened to the various sports that she might be able to participate in because her experiences with Sole Train allowed her to think more broadly about her potential. Another Young Sole stated that the program helped him to think about himself differently; he realized that he is not "as shy" as he had previously thought.

***Sub-theme 6: Demonstrated environmental mastery.*** Many who join Sole Train have never exercised consistently before, so running a five-mile race or half marathon at the end of programming is unfamiliar territory. Ryff's (1989) definition of environmental mastery centers around managing one's self in the world, and effectively making it through challenging situations. On multiple occasions, the youth interviewed spoke about the ways that they handled the nerves and anxiety that they felt on the day of the Run to Remember Race; these portions of data were coded as "navigating new experiences."

The young runners spoke of controlling some of the things that they could on race day to ease their nerves and “manage themselves” in the midst of the chaotic experience. They talked of things like joking with friends to help them calm down, and about strategizing about what to wear on race day and what to fuel their bodies with during the race. These youth, who were once unsure of what they might be able to accomplish with the group, were able to think critically about how to make the best of an uncomfortable situation by the end of Sole Train programming.

**Theme 3: Sole Train as positive experience.** Being a part of a caring climate and experiencing shifts related to psychological well-being levels are positive things. Those interviewed also brought up other aspects of the program that indicated that their overall time with the group was very positive. Therefore, the theme, “Sole Train as positive experience” emerged. The following three sub-themes fall under this theme and are explained in this section:

- **Worked through challenges:** This sub-theme was developed based on various codes connected to the challenges youth faced during Sole Train and how they dealt with these.
- **Connected to the program:** This sub-theme was created by grouping codes that focused on youth making an effort to remain connected to Sole Train.
- **Race day was powerful:** This sub-theme was formed based on codes related to Young Soles’ emotional descriptions of taking part in the race at the end of Sole Train programming.

***Sub-theme 1: Worked through challenges.*** As is discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, running is not necessarily easy. Being a part of any team or group can come with challenges, too. Just as with the Old Soles interviewed for this piece, Young Soles also brought up instances throughout Sole Train participation that they perceived as being difficult.

Four Young Soles discussed feeling a bit unsure at the beginning of Sole Train. Sections of data containing ideas about this insecurity were coded as “unsure early on.” One Young Sole initially worried that she might be “left behind” (by the group or within the group) because of her lack of running experience. She noted, though, “That didn’t happen.” Another Young Sole discussed feeling both optimistic and slightly intimidated early in training. While he was surprised and pleased that he was able to run for over two miles at his very first Sole Train practice, he also stated, “But I also, like after that practice I was kind of scared because if I was going to be training for a half marathon I would have to improve a lot.” These early concerns seemed to have dissipated for interviewees as they formed relationships, saw their running skills progress, and as their confidence built.

Throughout training, though, other challenges reportedly arose. Interviewees experienced things like illness and injury (the code used to describe challenging situations that were out of the control of the Young Soles was “external factors”). At times they struggled to feel motivated to train, particularly in cold, wet, “wintry” Boston weather. They spoke of depending on the energy of others in their Sole Train groups; if others were lacking drive on a given day, this became hard for interviewees.

Interviewees also spoke of being challenged by trying to run with others who walked or had different paces, and they spoke of the difficulties associated with trying to run again after taking breaks from running (which some of them did during the summer). However, these Young Soles spoke of working through these things. They reportedly used both their inner strength (one Young Sole said at times she just had to “push through”), and the strength given to them by the adults and youth at Sole Train to overcome the obstacles they faced.

Instead of focusing on these challenges, interviewees continuously returned to talking about how much they enjoyed the group, and benefited from it. One Young Sole described Sole Train as “something everyone should do.” All five interviewees also rated their overall Sole Train experiences as “very positive.”

***Sub-theme 2: Connected to the program.*** Each participant offered insight that indicated that they felt connected to the program. They described the program as having benefited them, and as something that felt important to them. Positive statements they made (that were along these lines) were coded as “general positive feedback.”

At the time that they were interviewed, each Young Sole planned to be involved in Sole Train in some capacity again this year. For four out of the five Young Soles interviewed, continued involvement is not necessarily easy. These four young people have switched schools, and therefore are not attending the school where their Sole Train group is based. Therefore, other portions of interview data were coded as “made an effort to come back [to Sole Train].”

These Young Soles are each attempting to take a bus (in Boston traffic) from their current schools to their original Sole Train site in order to remain involved with the group. This commute takes time and effort. Often they show up late or miss parts of practice. When asked why one Young Sole made such an effort, he replied, “Just kind of like last year was so fun, and I want to be able to run the half marathon again so I know I should keep on running or else I’ll lose like any talent, and um, yeah so I make sure that I try to go there as often as possible.”

Interviewees also stated that Sole Train’s people were one of the main reasons that they felt a deep connection to the program. Statements within interviews that focused on the importance of the people at Sole Train were coded as “returned [to Sole Train] because of the people.” Four out of five interviewees discussed continuing to participate in the program for another year because of the people involved.

One Young Sole spoke about feeling as if he needed the people at Sole Train in order to even run. He learned over the summer how much less fun training felt without his Sole Train team to run with. Another Young Sole said that “a lot” of her motivation for returning for another year of Sole Train was “the people.” One Young Sole described his positive feelings toward Sole Train, and his desire to stay connected to the program by stating that, “Friends, definitely, and all of the good memories we had in Sole Train last year,” keep him involved.

***Sub-theme 3: Race day was powerful.*** Sole Train has numerous goals for how young participants should develop as people and gain life skills through the program.

However, the goal that stands out as the primary physical goal is for Young Soles to complete either the five-mile race or the half marathon during Boston's Run to Remember. The day of the race was described as being incredibly powerful for the participants interviewed. It was the culmination of the months of (sometimes difficult) training that they had put in. According to the Young Soles, this day was fun, overwhelming, exciting, affirmative, and exhilarating. Race day, for them, seemed to be a major factor in their overall positive Sole Train experiences.

One idea brought up in the interviews was that initially, race day was overwhelming (and at times nerve-wracking) for Young Soles (the code "overwhelmed/excited" labeled sections that spoke to these feelings). Young Soles discussed waking up early, not being able to eat much, worrying about if they were going to be able to finish, and wondering about things like whether they would get cramps when running. The Young Soles said that there were so many people at the race, and that the first miles felt crowded with runners.

These young people quickly shifted their descriptions of race day, though. As they talked more about how race day progressed they discussed feeling less scared and more excited. They spoke about things like jumping around with friends, getting energy from others, about receiving support from both adults and youth during the race. They also spoke of having fun and about being pleasantly surprised by their physical abilities during the run. One Young Sole felt both nervous and excited; he said,



And then before, like right before the race I was like trying to act not as nervous but I was like really nervous. Um, and especially seeing how many runners there were, that's kind of exciting I think it's the third biggest, no sorry, the second biggest half marathon in Boston. So then I just felt excited 'cause it's like something that you're taking part of.

He also talked feeling upbeat during the race. He said, "Yeah, we [he and his friends] just had so much adrenaline and it was like so exciting 'cause like [it was] the thing we'd been training for all year."

Three out of five of those interviewed also talked about the extremely positive feelings that they experienced once they had actually finished the race (coded as "exhilarated at finish"). One Young Sole described the feeling of finishing as "amazing." The Young Soles seemed to recognize that finishing was a major achievement. One stated that when they finished they felt accomplished and excited about being able to say, "I ran a half marathon." Another Young Sole spoke of the ideas that race day contributed to an overall positive Sole Train experience, and that finishing the race was powerful. She said,

I think the race was my best day. It was like, I don't know, I think we trained so much for the race day, and it's just like that race day, even though you wake up at like five in the morning and it's freezing cold, that's like the best day, 'cause you crossed the finish line and it's like the best feeling in the world.

**Theme 4: Became runners.** The Young Soles made it clear that Sole Train participation not only impacted their psychological well-being, but that it had shifted their views of their strength and running abilities. Interviewees specifically spoke of things like enjoying running, making running progress and improvements, and eventually viewing themselves as runners because of the program. Therefore, the theme, “Became runners” was developed. The following two sub-themes fall under this theme:

- New running relationship: This sub-theme came to be because youth talked about their development as runners over the course of Sole Train.
- Experienced physical benefits: This sub-theme was developed because youth discussed running improvements and accomplishments with Sole Train.

***Sub-theme 1: New running relationship.*** The majority of those interviewed did not have a relationship with running prior to Sole Train participation. Though a few had had some athletic experience on different types of sport teams, none considered themselves to be runners before joining the group (the code “did not identify as runners prior to Sole Train” labeled sections of data that included this ideas). In fact, one Young Sole decided to join the group despite being both inexperienced at running and not actually liking to run at all. This person said, “I hadn’t run before that, I actually really hated running before that, but I decided to try it out.”

While that particular Young Sole began the program “hating” running, three out of the five Young Soles brought up times throughout Sole Train that they enjoyed the physical act of running or had fun while they were running. Sections of interviews where

Young Soles discussed actually enjoying running were coded as “running as fun.” One Young Sole said that he looked forward to Sole Train practice days because he knew he’d get to run, while another said that training was “never not fun.” Additionally, Young Soles spoke of having fun while running on race day, despite feeling nerves. One Young Sole described enjoying himself while running by saying, “We were all by our sides laughing while we were running. Just having a good time.”

For the Young Soles, one other fun aspect of running was the incentives that Sole Train participants were given. One Young Sole described feeling motivated by a bracelet system used by the program. He talked about how it was fun for him to run, improve, and have a physical representation of his progress that he could see. He said,

Oh, another one of the best parts of Sole Train is throughout the year, like one of the main reasons we would run long distances is that we wanted to keep our mileage up because the teachers like track the mileages on the computer so you can tell what you ran that day, and like there was different bracelets for different amounts, so when you get five you get like a really light blue, and then when you get ten, or not ten, 25, you get this, a little darker, and then 50 is a little darker, and then 75 and then 100. And then at the end, or I got 100, like half way but then by the end of the year I had like 230 or something.

He went on to say, “So, that was one of the best parts because we were just motivated to get all the bracelets that there were and, um, we would just wear them at the practices just

like five bracelets just all at one time.”

The runners also talked about how things like snacks, t-shirts, sweatshirts and other “perks” that they received as part of Sole Train helped to make running bearable and even fun. One Young Sole said about these things (in a somewhat humorous way), “One of the most motivating things is that at the end of practice we get a granola bar, so like it keeps you moving ‘cause you’re like hungry while you’re running.”

Young Soles may not have thought that running could be fun, and may not have considered themselves to be runners before joining the program. However, their self-views (in terms of running) changed with Sole Train. They talked about beginning to see themselves as physically strong, capable, and as “real” runners. Therefore, the code “saw themselves as runners” was used to label certain portions of the youth interview data.

One Young Sole began the program as someone who had never run. She ended Sole Train as someone who now runs track, cross-country, and plans to continue with Sole Train. Another Young Sole explained how he not only felt like a runner, but how Sole Train helped him identify as a part of the running community in Boston. He said (when discussing Sole Train’s “long run” training days),

Because it [the long run] would take like two and a half hours for the 12 mile run, ‘cause we, um, had to wait for some people, so then, but one of the best parts was the Charles River was like a really good place to run, ‘cause I mean you can watch the real runners and the other runners, um, and it kind of felt like it was like a running community, because there were so many other people that were also

training for like various races, like whatever they were doing, but we were like right there and we were only like 12 years old.

With this statement, this Young Sole also summarized the unique opportunity that Sole Train provides for youth to ideally grow emotionally while achieving impressive running accomplishments at a young age.

*Sub-theme 2: Experienced physical benefits.* All five interviewees were able to complete the race of their choice (either the five-mile or the half marathon), and were able to achieve the physical goals that they set for themselves at Sole Train. Specifically, three of the five interviewees spoke of recognizing that they were improving as runners as Sole Train progressed (their thoughts on this were coded as “recognized running progress”). Additionally, interviewees frequently brought up the distances that they were able to run during Sole Train and the fast running paces they were able to achieve with the group (which were coded as “noted pace or mileage”).

One Young Sole said that they were “physically improved” because of the group. Another spoke of the endurance they experienced while playing a different sport because of the physical training they had gotten from Sole Train. Another spoke of running feeling “easier” as their time in the program went on. Still another said that because of Sole Train, “My cardio, it was definitely like way better last year than it was like before that.”

Interviewees also spoke with pride about running long distances and running

quickly. One said that over the course of the Sole Train program he logged about 200 running miles. These Young Soles also often spoke of being “surprised” by their abilities. They discussed regularly running under ten-minute miles — even during long runs and the final race — and not feeling tired or terribly challenged. One Young Sole said (of his performance at the final race), “And me and my friend started running at like an eight-minute pace toward the last couple miles because we weren’t tired, none of us got cramps.”

### **Summary of Results**

The codes, sub-themes, and themes that developed from this study’s data provide answers to this study’s research questions. The first research question asked how Sole Train coaches and participants perceived their experiences with the program. Despite discussing the challenges that accompanied program involvement, every subject presented as being enthusiastic about Sole Train when speaking with the PI. The majority of interview time with all subjects was dedicated to speaking about the positive parts of their Sole Train involvement. Both the Young Sole data and the Old Sole data ended up with themes related to each group’s positive Sole Train experience. Therefore, the answer to the first research question is that subjects perceived their overall experiences with Sole Train as positive ones.

The next research question(s) asked whether coaches tried to create caring climates, and whether participants experienced their teams’ climates as being caring. Results from both Old and Young Sole data suggested that Old Soles did attempt to

create caring climates and that Young Soles did experience the climate(s) that the coaches created as being caring. The results of the study suggested that the Old Soles worked to make their team members feel welcome, safe, and supported. The results also suggested that the Young Soles seemed to take note of the support, motivation and inspiration that the adults provided. The Young Soles spoke of the adults being important to their successes and their overall positive experiences; each Young Sole spoke about meaningful experiences that they had with their coaches.

The third research question(s) asked if Sole Train participants described their participation as being related to shifting aspects of their psychological well-being, and if coaches describe witnessed changes in participants' psychological well-being. Much like with the concept of a caring climate, neither the coaches nor participants interviewed used the specific terminology of "psychological well-being" when interviewed. However, individuals from both groups indicated that changes occurred in various aspects of participants' behaviors and how they carried themselves that align with Ryff's (1989) definition of psychological well-being.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This following chapter offers the PI's reflections on the findings from this study. This chapter also discusses the study's findings in terms of possible implications for Sole Train and other similar youth development through physical activity groups (although the PI is aware that qualitative study findings cannot be generalized, the findings from this study could potentially be useful to other groups like Sole Train). The PI also includes her own perspective in this section, and highlights challenges that she faced during her writing and research processes that could be potentially useful for other researchers. Finally, this chapter features this work's conclusion, after sharing with readers its limitations and its potential significance (beyond just its significance to Sole Train and other youth development through physical activity groups). Recommendations for future research that could possibly evolve from this project are also discussed.

### **Discussion**

#### **Results in relation to Ryff's (1989) definition of psychological well-being.**

Chapter 4 of this dissertation discussed in detail that Young Soles described experiencing emotional changes that align with Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being. Coaches also described witnessing such changes. Specifically, the coaches spoke often of the autonomy changes that they observed in participants, particularly regarding leadership, transfer, and participants becoming self-directed. The youth spoke in detail about having positive relationships with others.



During interviews, the coaches seemed to speak in more depth and with almost more passion about the emotional and behavioral changes they saw in Young Soles than the Young Soles themselves. The young interviewees certainly talked about growing and benefiting from the program (as the results section of this work indicated). Rather than go on about emotional shifts, though, they spoke more freely about running with their friends, physically improving, or the fun times they had with Sole Train.

Perhaps this points to the fact that the Old Soles were more comfortable being interviewed and generally more talkative than the Young Soles. This could also be attributed to the Old Soles being trained by Sole Train and being more focused on looking for ways that the group served participants. However, the differences in the Old and Young Soles' focuses may have occurred because the growth Young Soles experienced almost went unnoticed by the youth as it was happening; messages about evolving, learning and changing are integrated into all aspects of Sole Train programming. While running and hanging out with friends may be what stood out to participants, it may have been within these things that personal development was able to occur.

Karcher (2009) suggested that the most effective coaches or mentors are neither too preachy nor too playful. The same idea can be applied to Sole Train programming; Sole Train, according to those interviewed as part of this research, is a group where participants can both learn and have fun. This finding might be useful for other youth development through physical activity groups. These types of groups might want to integrate life lessons into all aspects of programming, without lecturing or making

programming so serious and goal-driven that participants lose interest. Rather, it may be important for participants to consistently be exposed to programs' positive messaging, even when engaging in the more fun, active parts of the group.

**Sole Train emphasized fun and joy.** While the previous section discussed that some of the more fun elements of Sole Train (such as running with friends or playing motivational running games) may have stood out to Young Soles, and learning may have occurred within these, fun was brought up in both the Old and Young Sole interviews as an important part of Sole Train. Therefore, a finding from this study is that Sole Train is a program doing serious work through fun, and that Sole Train does diverge from Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being definition because fun plays such a major role in the program. Ryff (1989) stressed that psychological well-being is about becoming person who can function effectively in life, and not necessarily about having "short term affective well-being" or about feeling happy or having fun (p. 1077). Conversely, the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017) emphasized that Old Soles try to make Sole Train fun.

Certainly both the adults and youth involved in this study spoke of significant — even life altering — impacts of Sole Train. Interviewees spoke of interactions with others in the program that moved them, and talked about powerful things like Young Soles' self-views changing. However, they — particularly the Young Soles — spoke often about the fun that they had as part of Sole Train. The Young Soles talked about joking, cheering, playing games, and laughing.

At times, this paper has emphasized the challenges that can accompany

adolescence. However, when reviewing the data and seeing that it was often the small, funny moments that the Young Soles brought up, one thing was clear: these young people wanted to enjoy their time outside of school with people that made them feel good. Old Soles discussed both trying to be those people — through doing things like making up games and “treating running like play” — and having fun themselves.

Therefore, Sole Train seems to be a group that strikes a unique balance. The program has clear guidelines, standards and trainings for coaches, and expectations for participants and their guardians. It also leaves enough space for all involved to have fun and feel happy at Sole Train (which are not things included in Ryff’s (1989) definition of psychological well-being). Other youth development through physical activity groups could use this finding as a reminder that good work cannot be done if a group is not a place that participants want to be, and therefore choose not to be. Perhaps other groups, like Sole Train did during the 2015–2016 program, can try to foster fun. This finding also leads to an avenue for future research; Sole Train could also be studied in relation to other types of well-being beyond psychological well-being, which may be more focused on feeling good and enjoying experiences in life.

**The connection between caring climate and psychological well-being at Sole Train.** The PI began this research with the intention of looking at Sole Train in relation to the concepts of caring climate and psychological well-being separately. As the PI began to review other studies related to each of these concepts, some such works suggested that caring climates might lead to well-being (e.g. Fry et al., 2012). One finding that the PI did not initially expect, but did see, is that this seems to be the case

with Sole Train: there is a potential connection between the ideas of caring climate and shifts in psychological well-being within the group.

Fry et al. (2012) described how a caring climate could lead to well-being shifts in youth development groups/physical activity group participants. These researchers found that,

It may be that a caring climate helps eradicate youngsters' fears that they will be put down, made fun of, and chided for their mistakes and/or weaknesses. If so, it is possible that this type of climate helps youngsters feel more confident "putting themselves out there," allowing others to get to know them better, and setting them up to feel safe and comfortable about expressing their positive emotions and monitoring and dealing appropriately with their negative emotions (Fry et al., 2012, pp. 51 –52)

In the case of the present study, Sole Train coaches tried to create groups that were experienced as being both physically and emotionally safe by participants. Coaches tried to make participants feel supported; they tried to build them up. In fact, an idea that came up often, and in all four coach interviews, was that coaches tried to help participants believe in themselves and tried to "build I can mindsets" within youth participants.

It is possible that the safe and supportive climates that coaches created allowed youth participants to feel both comfortable and empowered. Participants spoke of Sole

Train as a place where they were able to do things like authentically connect with others, push themselves, and work toward achieving big goals (or a place where they experienced increases in the dimensions of their psychological well-being, including positive relations with others, personal growth, and purpose in life, respectively).

The interview protocols in this piece did not specifically delve deeper into the connection between the Sole Train atmosphere and psychological well-being shifts within participants. However, the interviewees spoke of Sole Train as having an atmosphere that was “encouraging, not competitive.” They described being coached by people who were (among other things) “caring,” “motivating,” and “inspirational.” Young Soles also described recognizing that they could persevere and achieve big goals because of the group, and that they felt confident, capable and connected because of involvement. Thus, the youth involved did seem to thrive because the program’s climate allowed them to do so.

This finding could possibly be important for Sole Train and other youth development through physical activity groups. A caring climate was created at Sole Train without that program’s goals specifically being based around Newton et al.’s (2007) exact definition (as far as the PI knows). Old Soles’ though, did go through an orientation that emphasized the importance of coaches creating warm, welcoming climates for participants and stressed the possibility that such atmospheres might be linked to participants thriving (Old Soles’ Orientation Guide, 2016). Therefore, the caring climates at Sole Train seemed to develop based on a combination of how the Old Soles were instructed to lead their teams, and the mindsets and experiences that coaches

brought in from their “youth focused backgrounds” (which were discussed in Chapter 4). Coaches spoke of leading their teams with kindness and respect simply because that is how they led, and how Sole Train was designed to be led.

Sole Train and other youth development through physical activity programs might be able to look to Newton et al.’s (2007) definition and language when planning programming and training coaches (though Sole Train does already use language in its coach orientation that closely aligns with Newton et al.’s (2007) caring climate definition). Groups like Sole Train may also be able to look to Sole Train’s coach training model (including its three-hour detailed in-person orientation), for direction on how to train coaches across multiple sites and on how to prepare coaches to create safe, respectful group climates. Other youth development through physical activity groups could also try to ensure that they are bringing on coaches and volunteers who have backgrounds and dispositions that align with positive program missions, even before training them; the youth-focused backgrounds of the Old Soles in this piece indicated that Sole Train is, to some degree, already doing this.

Additionally, groups like Sole Train could possibly also implement periodic check-ins with participants to monitor if they are feeling as Newton et al. (2007) described — invited, safe, supported, valued and respected — as this type of climate could be linked to well-being. The youth at Sole Train, according to the Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017), do currently fill out monthly surveys (as well as end of the year surveys and exit interviews) about their experiences. The monthly surveys currently focus on youth reflecting about what they did that month, such

as whether they participated in opening/closing circles and “supported other Soles” (Sole Train Old Soles’ Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 27). These surveys could also include sections on how young people felt about themselves during programming and their perceptions of the program’s climate.

This study suggests that shifts related to psychological well-being are occurring at Sole Train; such changes could possibly have the potential to occur at similar groups. To increase the likelihood that psychological well-being is boosted, such groups could intentionally focus on themes related to Ryff’s (1989) concept. Similarly, other groups could even potentially integrate some techniques that use messages or lessons from well-being therapy into programming.

**The importance of running with Sole Train.** While the PI did identify a potential connection between Sole Train having a caring climate and participants experiencing positive emotional shifts, it cannot be definitively stated that the caring climate alone was the reason Young Soles benefited from the group. As was referenced earlier, the present study looked at *what* happened at Sole Train, while future research could study more about *why* participants had particular experiences (such as psychological well-being changes) with the group.

When reflecting on the study’s results, it is clear that in addition to Sole Train’s caring climate, the running portion of the program was particularly important to Young Soles (and that running may have been linked to emotional shifts, or that some combination of running and the caring climate might be connected to such changes). A major theme that came through from the Young Sole data, which did not emerge from the

Old Sole data, was that the Young Soles became runners through the program. This means that the Young Soles spoke often of the running component of Sole Train, and talked about their physical running improvements, accomplishments, and the enjoyable parts of running that they experienced.

The Young Soles spoke about running with pride, and discussed sometimes surprising themselves with their running abilities; their descriptions made running stand out as an influential, empowering aspect of Sole Train, and one that could be possibly connected to positive emotional shifts they experienced. In other sections of their data, they spoke in detail about the day of the program's final race, too. The way Young Soles discussed race day also indicated that the running parts of Sole Train resonated with them as being important.

Although portions of this work have focused on the potential physical and emotional risks that may accompany adolescent running, the Young Soles in this piece spoke of running in a positive way. Young Soles seemed to have a positive view of running even as they joined the program; they made statements including, "I knew Sole Train was about running and I might be able to get healthier," and "I thought it would be a really fun thing to do," and discussed how Sole Train might "build [one Young Soles'] endurance." While the Young Soles acknowledged that the physical act of running with Sole Train could feel difficult at times, they all signed on with open minds about trying to run with the group.

As the program progressed, the participants seemed to continue to hold positive views of the sport. Young Soles talked about running as being both challenging and fun.



One Young Sole noted that Sole Train did not make her feel pressured in terms of her running performance, which she appreciated. Other Young Soles described the group as being flexible in terms of running, and mentioned being able to decide, at times, how they would be running on certain days (for instance, how far and how fast and whether walking would be involved). Sole Train's encouraging, somewhat flexible approach to running seemed to help participants view the activity as enjoyable, positive, and as something to try hard at, but not take so seriously that it poses physical or emotional health risks. Because Sole Train's focus is more on helping Boston's youth develop optimally, rather than on training elite runners, participants may have been somewhat protected from some of the risks that can accompany more physically intense running programs or programs where winning running competitions is a priority<sup>6</sup>.

According to Erikson (1994), adolescence is the phase of life when young people are struggling to understand not only who they are, but also where they fit into society. Adolescence is a period when young people can only imagine what they might become, and a time when young people are searching for connections with peers and affirmation from others (Erikson, 1994). It is because adolescence is confusing, particularly in terms of identity, that young people often look to other people or groups to try to form bonds that will help them to, in Erikson's (1994) words, "arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified" (p. 132).

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<sup>6</sup> The PI did not ask subjects about things like disordered eating or over-training in this piece, and is aware that risks can accompany even non-competitive running. All interviewees in this piece spoke of running as positive, though, which is what the PI is trying to convey.

Erikson (1994) described adolescence as a time when young people are searching for identity clarification, and the subjects in the present study repeatedly brought up the idea that Young Soles identified with Sole Train. Adult subjects spoke of Sole Train feeling like a family, and it seemed to them that Young Soles appreciated being a part of the group and took pride in it. In fact, the Old Soles discussed that Young Soles felt that “Sole Train is who I am” (this was brought up by a coach and shared in Chapter 4 of this piece, too). If Young Soles are, like Erikson (1994) discussed, adolescents looking to define themselves, being a part of Sole Train may lead them to identify as a part of a positive group, and also as people who live out aspects of the group’s vision (including respect, effort, courage and more).

While this study’s data pointed to the idea that participants identified with being a part of Sole Train, as a program, it also indicated that Young Soles came to view themselves as runners. Young Soles brought up appreciating feeling like “real” runners while on long runs with Sole Train in Boston, and noted that being part of the Run to Remember was special because it is a large Boston race. Additionally, each of the young people discussed coming into Sole Train without much running or athletic experience, and then getting stronger — physically and emotionally — throughout the group. One Young Sole stated that before Sole Train she never really had a sport that felt like it was “hers.” Through Sole Train, though, she became someone who runs cross-country, runs with Sole Train, and can call herself a runner. The following exchange between the Young Sole and the PI captured this young person’s thoughts on identifying as a runner:

Young Sole: And I don't know, I feel like I hadn't really found the sport that I really loved yet, I mean I loved softball but I'm not the best at it, and I really wanted something that I could do often, all year, that just felt like it when people asked me what sport I did I could say that, and feel like its my own, and Sole Train kinda' helped me figure out that I really wanted to be determined and get better at it and have that be the sport that I really dedicate myself to...

PI: So now when people ask do you say you're a runner?

Young Sole: Yes.

Another Young Sole spoke about running and Sole Train participation as having influenced their identity. The program allowed her to think of herself differently because of the running accomplishments she'd experienced. She grew to see herself as someone who could push herself, train "throughout the whole entire year and not give up" because it was clear to her that "not a lot of people can like be like, yeah I can run a five-mile marathon [or race] and have never ran before."

The young people also talked about race day, and the physical act of running the program's end race, as being really important to them. One Young Sole spoke in a detailed way about his performance on that day. Though he was excited and nervous before the race, by the seventh mile he and his friends were running a ten-minute mile pace (but this quickened to an eight-minute mile pace toward the races end, because, according to this person, "we weren't tired, none of us got cramps"). The detail that the Young Soles provided when speaking about running the final race made it clear that the

race experience (and running generally) were things that they viewed as important. One Young Sole said that for most of the race he was not overly challenged physically, but then said,

We were going at a pretty slow pace, but then, um, me and two of my friends just like we started going really fast, and we like it was probably around mile four, and we were going like really fast and we lasted the four miles like and at the end of the last four miles we were, it was like the perfect pace. It turned out and, um, we like we couldn't use much more at the end, but like we did try and get like a final sprint and I was really, really tired at the end.

Therefore, the data collected in the present study suggested that Sole Train helped participants identify as a part of something positive: Sole Train. The data also indicated that the group helped participants to see themselves as runners, and as young people who could conquer difficult feats both within (and possibly outside of) the program. This finding might be useful for other running-based youth development groups; they could possibly emphasize participants' emotional growth and development first, while still celebrating physical improvements and accomplishment. Such groups could also consider that participants might be looking for identity clarification; these groups could attempt to affirm participants, help them feel connected to the group and those in it, and could try to help participants identify and understand their unique strengths.

Such groups might also aim to have encouraging, rather than competitive, climates. Additionally, flexibility (in terms of running or training) and a lack of pressure

from authority figures could be useful approaches in other running-based youth development groups; these elements of Sole Train seemed to allow participants in this piece to come to appreciate the positive parts of running on their own terms and become both better runners and more evolved individuals.

**Connections formed between coaches and participants.** Sole Train's goals and mission make it clear that the adults involved are expected to be supportive, caring mentors. Coaches should try to connect with youth participants and help them develop as people. Literature also points to the importance of coaches teaching sport skills, life skills, and trying to connect with athletes. Whitley, Bean, and Gould's (2011) study with young, socially vulnerable athletes suggested that quality coaches are able to teach both sport and life skills. Karcher (2009) reported that the best mentors focus both on helping young people achieve goals and on forming close, almost friend-like relationships with them. The next major finding in the present study is that the youth and coaches did develop strong connections and even became friends through Sole Train.

This study's results revealed that rather than Sole Train having an "us versus them" tone, where adults were authority figures simply training participants, it actually had a tone of "we're all in this together" (at one point in an adult interview, a coach actually used that phrase — "we're all in this together" — when talking about how they approached their group). Karcher (2009) discussed how effective mentors often use a "we style" developmental approach to connect with youth, while still helping youth to learn life skills and focus on the future. The idea that the Old and Young Soles have a unique connection, and even depend on each other for encouragement and motivation,

also came up in Kelly McGonigal's (2015) writing on Sole Train<sup>7</sup>. She observed that the adults in Sole Train often needed to get support from young participants, not just give it.

Both Old and Young Soles seemed to adhere to a point made in Sole Train's Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017), that "Old and Young Soles share in the responsibility to motivate each other" (p. 42). Coaches in this piece spoke of forming meaningful connections with Young Soles, while the Young Soles spoke of feeling as though they had formed relationships and become "friends" with the adults. Whitley, Bean, and Gould (2011) suggested that young athletes appreciated when coaches formed personal connections with them and almost felt like family to them.

This finding could possibly be of use to both Sole Train and similar groups. First, this could reinforce to Sole Train that the group appears to be teaching coaches to balance being as open and natural with participants as possible, while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. Other groups like Sole Train could be similarly inclined to try to break down some of the traditional "leader versus participant" barriers that may be perceived as existing by some who join programs that involve a physical activity component. Coaches could be trained in a type of (appropriate) "realness" (one of the tips that the Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide (2016–2017) gave coaches was, "be yourself") (p. 61). Groups might want to teach leaders how to allow youth to see their vulnerable sides, and to see and understand that adults face and can overcome challenges, too (while, again, maintaining appropriate adult/youth boundaries).

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<sup>7</sup> McGonigal (2015) observed that youth and adults supported each other. While her observations relate to a finding in this piece, the PI came to her own conclusions about both youth and adults supporting one another when reviewing the data and finding references to the importance of the relationships between Old and Young Soles.

Groups like Sole Train might also use this finding to help young participants feel less alone. The results from this study indicated that friendships do not have to look any certain way — they do not have to be teen to teen, and they do not have to mean fitting in to any certain peer group. Perhaps other youth development through physical activity programs could integrate techniques that Sole Train coaches seem to be using — including communicating with participants and really noticing youth. Other groups might be able to encourage their leaders to emphasize that they are willing to be there for those involved (once again, in an appropriate way), and to try to build respectful, authentic relationships, based on really getting to know their participants.

**Coaches were inspired and changed by Sole Train.** As was just discussed, youth and coaches at Sole Train established unique relationships within the program, which all subjects spoke of appreciating. Another major finding of this study, which also highlights how coaches are not simply standoffish authority figures with limited investment in the group, is that while the Young Soles interviewed did learn, grow, and change during or because of Sole Train, so did the adults involved. The coaches experienced life changes from coaching, just as Young Soles experienced shifts from participating.

Both Young and Old Soles spoke of perceiving their overall experiences as being positive because they developed through the program. In terms of the Young Soles, they identified some emotional and relationship changes that they experienced (which often aligned with Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being), and spoke about how program involvement shifted their thinking about their futures. Walsh (2008)

highlighted that “adolescence is a crucial life stage for planning one’s future” (p. 209).

While the youth subjects in this study did not state specific future plans, on a number of occasions the youth mentioned thinking that they might be able to accomplish large or different goals in the future because of Sole Train (such as finishing the half marathon if they hadn’t yet, completing a marathon, participating in other sports, or “anything”).

The Old Soles discussed also Sole Train changing them both personally and professionally. They spoke of learning about themselves and how they interact with others because of their time coaching. The coaches also often described being emotionally impacted by working closely with young people and witnessing how they grew and changed. The Old Soles referenced shedding tears, being amazed by participants, and realizing that all of their hard work as coaches made a difference to the young participants. They also all discussed coaching for multiple seasons, as Sole Train changed them, and they, in turn, became connected and committed to the program.

The numerous overlaps in themes and responses between the coach and youth interviews (including both groups having positive overall experiences, growing, and being inspired by one another) point to the fact that Sole Train may be more than simply a youth development group. It may actually be a group that can aid in the development of anyone who truly commits as either a coach or a participant. Perhaps if anyone involved carries themselves in accordance with the program’s goals and mission, various aspects of their lives may be impacted.

The importance of having strong, positive relationships between coaches and athletes has been highlighted throughout this work. However, this study finding (that



both youth and adults developed because of the group) might be of value to both Sole Train and other youth development through physical activity groups; it could help groups like Sole Train consider the idea of really serving their whole community. Obviously such groups should first aim to benefit their youth populations. However, they could also include a focus on helping adult coaches grow and develop as people. Just as youth in such groups are often urged to openly communicate, to speak up about their feelings in things like opening or closing circles, and to push themselves to try new things, perhaps other youth development through physical activity groups might also be able to include opportunities for coaches to do these types of things.

The PI is aware that Sole Train does have a coach orientation, coach trainings, and encourages communication between coaches and between coaches and Sole Train leadership. Sole Train also seems to focus on coaches pushing themselves during the Sole Train season. Adults, not just youth participants, are advised to give effort while at Sole Train, particularly in regards to sprinting the final stretch of any run (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017). Certainly some coaches may already be naturally be more inclined to be active participants in the groups that they lead. However, if Sole Train (even more than it already does), and groups like it, include specific goals and plans to help all coaches — whether they are naturally inclined to try to gain things from the groups they lead or not — develop along *with* young people, teams could potentially be more cohesive and all individuals could benefit.

**Challenges faced by Old and Young Soles.** This study's results suggested that both Sole Train youth and adults benefited from the group, and that Sole Train is linked

to really positive things like participants' well-being levels shifting and feeling cared about. However, the results also revealed that the group was not perfect. Both Old and Young Soles spoke of challenges that they faced during Sole Train. Individuals from both groups brought up feeling frustrated, at times, with physical or uncontrollable hurdles during programming.

The coaches interviewed spoke of having days when coaching felt difficult because of particular administrative tasks associated with their roles. The Old Soles described days with bad weather, and how they, like the Young Soles, are people who may have been at their best or felt like running on some days. Participants talked about days where they, too, simply were not feeling or performing their best. They also talked about being challenged by things like bad weather, injuries, and feeling overwhelmed.

The ways that both the Young and Old Soles described dealing with difficulties were similar, too. Both groups described overcoming the challenges that came up within Sole Train by drawing from the positive parts of Sole Train. They looked to others in the program (no matter their age or role) for support, and they utilized the reserve of life skills that the group was teaching or giving them to persevere.

This could be useful information for groups like Sole Train. Such groups might choose to work to build strength and coping skills within participants to help them deal with group-related challenges, or those in other areas of their lives. They could also aim to create a connected community who can support one another through hard times. The results from this work suggested that these are things occurring at Sole Train.

**The PI's perspective, challenges, and the limitations caused by the PI's role in the study.** As was mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the PI's personal and professional interests include working with young people in physical activity programs. The PI has had positive past experiences doing this type of work; one such role was in a physical activity setting that was attempting to create a caring climate for socially vulnerable young people. The PI also has a personal interest in the field of Positive Psychology and is intrigued by what it means to be well, and how people can become better, happier versions of themselves. Additionally, the PI also has a long, complicated personal relationship with the sport of running. Therefore, studying a running-based youth development group with a mission related to the concepts of caring climate and well-being was an exciting journey for the PI.

The PI does realize, though, that her interests and excitement may have shaped the design and the data analysis portions of this work. First, in terms of the interviews used in this study, some questions were crafted to obtain subjects' more general thoughts on the program, while others were really focused on trying to learn about the program in relation to the concepts of caring climate and psychological well-being. The PI is aware that the questions she created may have been too targeted to these particular concepts, leaving little room for other ideas to be brought up or explored within interviews.

Similarly, as the PI embarked on data analysis, she did so with a clear desire to answer her research questions, particularly in regard to, again, how Sole Train related to caring climate and psychological well-being. Therefore, as the data was being analyzed, the PI was specifically looking for how responses related to elements included in the

caring climate and psychological well-being concepts. This may have narrowed her focus too much, and led to her missing other concepts or ideas within the data that may have been meaningful.

Additionally, after working with her dissertation committee, the PI became aware that she did not have to analyze the study's data so rigidly in relation to the concepts of caring climate and psychological well-being. From her discussions with the committee she came to understand that outlying data is acceptable, and that some of the data that she viewed as fitting into particular categories may have actually been able to be coded differently (L. Hayden, personal communication, June 7, 2017). This led to the researcher learning a valuable lesson for future work: that it is acceptable to recognize and be open to ideas within the data that may not directly connect to the study's primary focuses or questions.

The PI also came to understand, after gaining the perspective of those on her dissertation committee, that other theories, including the self-determination theory (which means that people need to experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness for optimal mental health and to become intrinsically motivated) could be considered when thinking about the types of growth and changes that Sole Train participants experienced (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci's (2000) definition of the self-determination theory — not just the concepts of caring climate or psychological well-being — could be connected to Sole Train, as it is a program attempting to make participants feel capable and competent in terms of running, it requires that participants look within themselves for motivation, and it emphasizes the importance of feeling authentically connected with teammates and

adult coaches.

There is some overlap between the self-determination theory and Ryff's (1989) definition of psychological well-being (and the six dimensions she described as comprising this). Both concepts were developed to address what people's basic psychological needs are. Additionally, Ryan and Deci's (2000) idea of competence, or the sense that one can succeed at the tasks at hand, could connect to Ryff's (1989) description of environmental mastery, or the idea that to be well people must be able to manage themselves in the world around them. Similarly, both the self-determination theory and the concept of psychological well-being identify autonomy and strong connections with others as being vital to people's overall well-being. Therefore, although the PI was thinking about and interpreting this study's data in a particular way to learn more about caring climate and psychological well-being specifically, there are clearly avenues for future research on Sole Train (including research on Sole Train in relation to the self-determination theory).

Another challenge posed by the PI's role in this study is that as she began to learn more about Sole Train and conduct research on the group, the PI developed increasingly positive feelings about the program. The interactions that she had with subjects were very positive, and all subjects shared stories and information about the program that indicated that they had all benefited from program involvement. The PI was also cheerful, upbeat and positive when conducting interviews (although the PI's enthusiastic, conversational nature when interviewing may not have been a detriment to the study, as Bassett et al. (2008) suggested that researchers try to engage and make connections with

subjects, particularly teenage research subjects, and even use self-disclosure at times).

Also, the 5K event that the PI attended and observed was fun and people presented as enjoying themselves and being comfortable with one another at this race. Thus, the PI is aware that she may have gone into the data analysis process with the idea that the program is doing positive things for those involved (and although it was unintended, her positive views of the program may have played into the data analysis process to some degree). For these reasons, additional expert views on this study may need to be brought in to establish validity and break down any biases that the PI (who crafted, conducted, and analyzed interviews alone) brought to the work if publication of this study or its results were to be considered (L. Hayden, personal communication, June 7, 2017).

One final data analysis challenge occurred for the PI. The concepts of caring climate and psychological well-being do have some overlapping elements (as one is focused on creating an atmosphere where young people can grow and the other is focused on individual growth). Additionally, the six dimensions of psychological well-being can also overlap with each other at times, as they all involve individuals changing for the better. Therefore, there were times when the PI was left to decide whether a meaning unit from the data should be coded to align with caring climate or with a particular aspect of psychological well-being (or whether the data had to do with something else, like a subject's overall experiences). The PI tried to do this by reflecting on the meaning units and thinking critically about what codes made the most sense. In Chapter 4, the PI attempted to make her rationale and definitions of each sub-theme clear, and attempted to

explain how particular codes fit into these. The PI acknowledges, though, that a different expert may see sections of data as needing to be coded or interpreted differently (and again, this would need to be addressed before any portions of this work could be published).

While the previous section outlined some issues the PI encountered once the data had been obtained from subjects, the PI also encountered challenges in terms of actually getting data to begin with. As was briefly covered in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the PI did struggle to contact the first group of potential adolescent participants that the Director of Sole Train provided. Between October and December of 2016 the PI tried to reach out to this group, and left voice mails, emails and texts for these young people. As time went on, though, the PI became uncomfortable repeatedly trying to contact this group. They did not know the PI personally, and they had no obligation to make an effort to connect with her or respond to her. The PI also did not like feeling as though she, as an adult (who was a stranger to these young people), was pestering young people, and therefore eventually stopped trying to reach them.

The PI was then left to consider how best to proceed. She briefly thought about re-connecting with the Director of Sole Train to see if she could provide additional ways to reach this group. The PI then realized that if the Director checked in with this group, they might feel coerced into participating, so as not to disappoint this person. Therefore, the PI went back to the Director and asked whether she could please provide the names of new potential participants, which she did. She also included contact information for the parents of this new group, thus allowing the PI to set up interviews through the parents

(who she knew she would need to talk to anyway, as all participants were under the age of 18).

Other researchers who are working with similar populations may learn from these challenges. First, others may look to this and come to understand that there is some value in being able to identify and accept when pursuing potential subjects feels either futile or uncomfortable. Also, perhaps finding ways to connect with the parents or guardians of potential subjects under that age of 18 might help to eliminate some logistical challenges that can come with being an unfamiliar adult trying to coordinate interviews with adolescents. However, while contacting parents may be helpful in terms of connecting with youth, this also raises issues about ensuring that young people are actually voluntarily participating, or whether they feel that they have to because their parents are involved (Bassett, et al., 2008). In the case of the present study, the researcher did include a section in the verbal (and written) assent forms that was intended to emphasize that no one would be angry if young participants chose not to take part, and all youth participants presented as being willing to speak about their experiences with the PI.

**Additional study limitations and other avenues for future research.** This study does have a number of limitations, in addition to the limitations associated with the PI's role in the work (which were discussed in the previous section). First, because of the study's qualitative design, the PI does not have any data on participants' psychological well-being levels or on their feelings about themselves generally prior to Sole Train participation. Therefore, the PI cannot definitively state that any positive shifts that seem to align with aspects of participants' psychological well-being occurred *solely* due to their



taking part in Sole Train. Adolescents encounter many things over the course of an academic year that could influence their feelings of well-being. While the PI did try to address this limitation by focusing interview questions on the role that Sole Train played in participants' well-being, the PI is aware that she could not eliminate this limitation.

Subjects self-selected to take part in this study; this is also a potential limitation. One could wonder if only those coaches and participants who had positive experiences with Sole Train and who had good feelings about the program volunteered for the study. It could be assumed that if an Old or Young Sole did not enjoy their time with Sole Train or felt disinterested in the program that they would not volunteer to take part. Therefore, just because the coaches and youth in this piece described the group as a caring place where positive emotional shifts took place, it cannot be concluded that everyone who has taken part in Sole Train shares these views.

Also, Sole Train is a program comprised of youth from different backgrounds, who are of different races, and who have various emotional issues and family situations. The group of young people that the PI interviewed was not representative of all the youth who took part in Sole Train during 2015–2016 programming. All five of the Young Soles interviewed had parents who were involved enough in participants' lives to interact with the PI. Also, four out of the five youth subjects took place at the same Sole Train site. Therefore, a perspective from a participant at each site was not obtained. Perhaps the results speak more to positive experiences at certain Sole Train locations rather than with the group in general.

Additionally, Sole Train aims, in part, to help serve socially vulnerable young

people in the Boston area who have struggled with difficult things, including systemic racism and violence. None of the youth interviewed in this study brought up dealing with these types of issues. Those interviewed seemed to describe Sole Train as a program that enhanced their lives, but did not discuss joining the program to “run *from* anything.” Again, the PI is aware that the youth interviewed were not a sample that represents the entire youth population within program. The PI also knows that interview questions did not touch on these types of topics. Future research could look more deeply into the risks that face those who join Sole Train, and what, if any, role Sole Train plays in helping participants deal with particular risks (including systemic racism and violence).

Also, this dissertation has brought up some of the emotional and physical challenges that can occur when young people participate in running-based activities. The PI did not ask about any negative impacts running might have had on these young people, although all Young Soles in this piece spoke of the sport in a positive way. Future studies could more closely examine the running part of Sole Train, and specifically look at participants’ experiences with the sport.

Clearly the current study presents only the points of view of those program participants and coaches who volunteered to take part. Interviewing teachers and parents about shifts they might perceive in participants’ psychological well-being levels could be an avenue for future research. The coaches interviewed were only able to observe participants’ behavior in particular situations (such as at Sole Train practices and events and in certain school situations). Therefore, interviewing teachers and parents could provide additional information about whether others might observe changes in how

Sole Train participants carry themselves and behave in other settings (the classroom, at home, with family members, etc.). Conducting research with these other key players in participants' lives could also explore more deeply whether and how lessons learned within Sole Train are actually being transferred outside of the group and are being applied to other areas of participants' lives.

The current study provided personal accounts of how Sole Train may have changed participants. In order to provide additional support for such accounts, there is a clear need for quantitative data to be gathered about Sole Train's impact on youth. Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (1989) and the Caring Climate Scale (2007) could be used with Sole Train participants (these could be used as part of a time series analysis or a social network analysis, if conducting a study before and after Sole Train participation would not be most appropriate for the group) to provide quantitative data on any changes experienced in these areas over the course of programming (L. Hayden, personal communication, June 1, 2017). Also, during the adult interviews in the present study, the coaches expressed a desire to see quantitative data on how and whether Sole Train participation influences participants' academic performances; this is another potential area for future research.

Ruini et al. (2009) and Sagatun et al. (2007) suggested that studies should seek to discover whether interventions designed to impact young people's well-being might cause any lasting/long-term changes. Similarly, long-term research on Sole Train's influence could and should be conducted. All interviews in the current study were conducted between three and seven months after 2015–2016 programming ended for

coaches and participants; interviews asked subjects to look back and reflect on their experiences. However, future research could evaluate the emotional states of participants just after the program's conclusion and could study these same states years down the line. Such research could provide additional information on the power of groups like Sole Train. If these types of programs are found to have lasting impacts on the well-being of participants, they could be looked at as (even more of) a tool to help adolescents develop optimally and an increased emphasis could be placed on trying to expose as many youth as possible to such programming.

**Study significance to policy and literature.** The discussion section of this piece highlighted how this study's findings could potentially be valuable to Sole Train and other youth development through physical activity groups. Ideally, this piece could also influence policy and add to well-being or youth development literature (as was discussed in the 'gap in literature' portion of this dissertation).

Both the youth and coaches interviewed for this piece provided glowing accounts of their experiences, and reportedly grew and changed because of Sole Train. Perhaps policy makers could consider making more youth development through physical activity interventions available to adolescents, particularly those living in communities dealing with poverty and violence (specifically at locations where they are required to be anyway, including their schools).

This study also highlighted ways that a running-based youth development group benefited all involved. It contributes to and supports studies that have suggested that groups that include a focus on youth development and a physical activity component may

influence well-being. The current study could also add to well-being literature, as it looks at Ryff's (1989) definition of well-being in connection with adolescents, an area where less research has been done. This study could also add to literature on running's benefits for adolescence, to some degree; while its primary focus was not on participants' relationships with the sport of running, its findings suggest that a particular running-based youth development group is making running fun, non-competitive, and that running might be linked to young people experiencing positive emotional shifts.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to provide insight into what it was like to be “in the shoes” of coaches and participants who took part in Sole Train's 2015–2016 program. What was learned was that it simply felt *good* to be “in their shoes” — the running shoes of *both* coaches and participants. The study also broke down why being a part of Sole Train felt, and was, *good* for those involved; this included that youth and coaches benefited from program participation, and that Young Soles, in particular, felt cared about and felt as though they became runners with Sole Train. The results also suggested that Sole Train does “deconstruct” the idea of impossible for some participants (Sole Train Old Soles' Program and Resource Guide, 2016–2017, p. 4). It helped the Young Soles that took part in this study to achieve a major running accomplishment that they can always look back on and draw inspiration from.

It is not clear if the young people interviewed for this particular piece were running away from something negative in their pasts or in their lives outside of Sole

Train when they joined. It is fair to say, though, that in today's world there are many internal and external obstacles in the way of adolescents feeling good about themselves and recognizing (and being able to build on) their potential. This study's findings suggested that Sole Train is a youth development program that allows youth to run right past such hurdles. Sole Train has created a safe space where young people do not stand alone — they are supported and encouraged. They also do not stand still — they are physically moving as they run (or walk), and are moving forward emotionally by experiencing personal growth and development.

Sole Train, according to participants in this study, is as simple as “a great after school activity” and as powerful as, “After Sole Train I feel like anything's kind of possible, like if I put my head and my mind into it, I can kind of accomplish what I want.” Sole Train, with its positive mission, caring adults, use of the sometimes challenging and often rewarding activity of running, and its focus on helping youth develop, gives participants the tools, inner strength, and the drive that they need to succeed. The group's focus on fun and teamwork, rather than competition, seems to have created an atmosphere where participants are able to take all of these things and run with them. And run, the Young Soles interviewed for this piece, did.

## **Appendix A: Recruitment materials**

Kristen Chipman Machon Additional Materials for Institutional Review Board  
Application –Submitted: 07/28/16

**Protocol Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

**Recruitment Flyer Recruitment Script (to be shared by the Sole Train director and associate director with potential subjects - both youth participants and coaches. The director/associate director will print and distribute; they will also go over this with potential subjects if there are questions).**

### **Please share your thoughts on Sole Train!**

A student from Boston University (we'll call her "the researcher" in this form) is very interested in our Sole Train program. She is looking for Sole Train participants and coaches who were involved all year and completed the half marathon or the five-mile race and who are willing to talk with her about their experiences. The researcher would contact you by phone at some point in the summer or fall of 2016. She would ask you some questions for about 30 minutes. The questions would be about the thoughts and feelings you have about Sole Train. The interviews are designed to be discussions (not hard tests with right or wrong answers). The answers you give to the researcher will be used so that she can write a paper on Sole Train. However, your name and identity will

not be linked to your answers so the things that you say the researcher will remain private. If you would be willing to talk to the researcher on the phone about Sole Train, please tell the Sole Train director or associate director. If you think you'd like to take part, the director or associate director will give you more information about the study, and if you are under 18, you will receive an information sheet about the study to take home and share with your parents. Please make sure that you show this sheet to them. The director or associate director will ask you for the best phone number to reach you and day of the week and a time of the day that might work for the researcher to call you at some point this summer or fall. Even if you agree to take part today, you can still choose to stop taking part in this study at any point. The researcher is really excited to work with you and looks forward to learning more about Sole Train from you. Thank you!



## Appendix B: Information sheets

***Information hand out for all potential participants over 18*** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman Machon

Description of Subject Population: Sole Train participants, ages 18–20, Sole Train adult coaches

Version Date: 05/16/2016

**Introduction:** Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let Kristen Chipman Machon (who will be referred to in this form as “the researcher”) know. If you have ANY questions about the research described in this form, please ask. The researcher would be happy to answer any questions. The person in charge of this study is Kristen Chipman Machon, a doctoral student at Boston University’s School of Education studying Sport Psychology. Her faculty advisor, overseeing the dissertation work that involves this study, is Dr. Amy Baltzell. Their contact information is included at the end of this form.

**Why is this study being done?** The purpose of this study is to learn more about your experience with Sole Train. You are being asked to sign this form because the researcher would like you to take part in this study (because you were involved in the Sole Train program during the 2015–2016 academic year). This research is unfunded, and will be the basis of the researcher’s dissertation. Up to 30 people (Sole Train youth participants and adult coaches) will take part in this study.

**How long is the research study?** The researcher would contact you by phone at some point in the Summer or Fall of 2016 to conduct your interview. Interviews will last about 30 minutes each. Interview questions will focus on your experiences with Sole Train.

**Audiotaping:** Interviews will be audiotaped (the researcher will be alone when she calls you and will put the phone call on speaker phone in order to audiotape it). It will not be possible to identify you from the tape (the researcher will not ask you to state your name or any identifying information on the tapes). These tapes will be labeled with codes, not names. A key to the code will connect subjects’ names to their audiotapes; the researcher will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able to see the tapes.

**What will happen if you agree to take part in this research study?**

The researcher will call subjects in the Summer or Fall of 2016. During that phone call, the researcher will ask you questions about your experiences with Sole Train. Interviews will be audiotaped.

**How Will You Store my Study Records and Keep them Confidential?** The researcher will keep the records of this study confidential by keeping any hard copies locked in her home office; no one but the researcher will have access to these. Any electronic materials related to this study will be kept on the researcher’s computer; all electronic files will be password protected. Please note, federal regulations require that study data be maintained by the researcher for a minimum of seven years following the COMPLETION of the study. The researcher will make every effort to

keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records (for instance, if you or someone else was in serious danger). The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

The Researcher and any member of her research team. The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies. Federal and state agencies that oversee or review research.

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. The researcher will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.

**Study Participation and Early Withdrawal:** Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free to decide to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential.

**If the researcher can withdraw the subject:** Also, the researcher may take you out of this study without your permission. This may happen because:  
The researcher thinks it is in your best interest. Other administrative reasons.

**What are the risks of taking part in this research study?** If you are interviewed, and feel challenged by answering questions while talking with the researcher, you can tell the interviewer at any time if you want to take a break or stop the interview. You always have the option not to answer any questions that makes you feel uncomfortable.

**Loss of Confidentiality:** The main risk of allowing the researcher to use and store your information for research is a potential loss of privacy. The researcher will protect your privacy by labeling your information with a code, and by keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?** There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this research. By taking part in the study, you may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. The researcher will share study findings with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something in study that could help Sole Train to continue doing the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years.

**Will I be paid to do this study?** No, you will not be paid to be in this study

**If I have any questions or concerns about this research study, who can I talk to? Contacts:**

If you have any questions about this study, you can talk with the researcher (Kristen Chipman Machon) at any time. The researcher's contact information is: Researcher: Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121 Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com

You can also contact the researcher's faculty advisor at any time. Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080 Email: baltzell@bu.edu If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University IRB directly at 617-358-6115. Thank you!

***Information hand out for all potential participants under 18***

Protocol Title: In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman

Description of Subject Population: Youth/teens ages 10–17

Version Date: 05/16/2016

**What is a Research Study?** Research studies help us to learn new things and test new ideas. People who work on research studies are called researchers. During research studies, the researchers collect a lot of information so that they can learn more about something. Kristen Chipman Machon (who will be called “the researcher” in this form), a student from Boston University, is asking you to be a part of a study to learn more about your time with Sole Train. The researcher is asking you join this study because were a part of Sole Train during this (the 2015–2016) school year. There are a few things you should know about this study: You get to decide if you want to be in the study You can say ‘No’ or ‘Yes’ Whatever you decide is OK If you say ‘Yes’ now, you can change your mind and say ‘No’ later No one will be upset if you say ‘No’ You can ask the researcher questions at any time

**What will I do if I am in this research study?** If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about Sole Train. This means that the researcher would call you this Summer or Fall and have you answer some questions. This phone call would last about 30 minutes. **Audio Taping** The researcher will audiotape the interviews that are part of this study. When you speak with her on the phone, the researcher will be alone and will put the conversation on speakerphone in order to record it. This will help the researcher to remember what was talked about in the interview session.

**What else could happen to me while I am in this study?** When you are interviewed, some of those questions could make you think or seem hard to answer. You can take your time and the researcher can help explain any questions or answer questions that you might have. No one but the researcher will know about your answers, so you will not have to feel worried or embarrassed about the things that you say.

**If I join this study will it help me?**

Being in this study will not help you. By taking part in the study, you may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. The researcher will share what she learns from the study with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something from the study that could help Sole Train continue to do the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years.

**Will I be paid to do this study?** No, you will not be paid to be in this study. The researcher appreciates your time!

**What will happen to my information in this study?** The researcher does not plan to share your name or other information about you if you join this study. However, there is a small chance that other people could find out your information. The researcher will do her best to make sure that doesn’t happen. There are some reasons why the researcher would share your

information:

If the researcher found out you were in serious danger, or if the researcher found out that somebody else was in serious danger.

**Taking part in this research study** You do not have to take part in this research study. You can say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. You can say ‘Yes’ now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell the researcher you want to stop. No one will be mad if you don’t want to take part in the study or if you change your mind about taking part in the study. Your parent or guardian can also decide to have you stop taking part in this study—that is OK too.

**Contacts** If you have any questions about this study, you can talk with the researcher (Kristen Chipman Machon) at any time. The researcher’s contact information is: Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121 Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com You can also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor at any time. Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080 Email: baltzell@bu.edu *The researcher will give you a copy of this paper if you want; just ask her, or send an email. Thank you!*

***Information hand out for guardians of all potential participants under 18***

Protocol Title: In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman Machon

Description of Subject Population: Sole Train participants, ages 10–17; this form is for their parents/guardians

Version Date: 05/16/2016

**Introduction:** Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about the minor in your care (referred to in this form as “your child”) taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let Kristen Chipman Machon (who will be referred to in this form as “the researcher”) know. If you have ANY questions about the research described in this form, please ask. The researcher would be happy to answer any questions. The person in charge of this study is Kristen Chipman Machon, a doctoral student at Boston University’s School of Education studying Sport Psychology. Her faculty advisor, overseeing the dissertation work that involves this study, is Dr. Amy Baltzell. Their contact information is included at the end of this form.

**Why is this study being done?** The purpose of this study is to learn more about your child’s experience with Sole Train. Your child is being asked to take part in the study because your child was involved in the Sole Train program during the 2015–2016 academic year. This research is unfunded, and will be the basis of the researcher’s dissertation. Up to 30 subjects (Sole Train youth participants and adult coaches) are being asked to act as subjects in this research study (which is being conducted as a part of Boston University).

**How long is the research study?** The researcher will contact your child via phone at some point in the Summer or Fall of 2016. Interviews will last about 30 minutes each. Interview questions will focus on participants’ experiences with Sole Train.

**Audiotaping:** Interviews will be audiotaped. The researcher will call your child when she is alone and can put the call on speakerphone and record it. It will not be possible to identify your child from the tape (the researcher will not ask your child to state his/her name or any identifying information on the tapes). These tapes will be labeled with codes, not names. A key to the code will connect participants’ names to their audiotapes; the researcher will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able to see the tapes.

**What will happen to your child as part in this research study?**

The researcher will call your child at some point in the Summer or Fall of 2016 and speak with them about Sole Train for about 30 minutes. During that time, the researcher will ask him/her questions about his/her experiences with Sole Train. Interviews will be audiotaped.

**How Will You Store my Child’s Study Records and Keep them Confidential?** The researcher will keep the records of this study confidential by keeping any hard copies locked in her home office. Any electronic materials related to this study will be kept on the researcher’s computer; all files will be password protected. Please note, federal regulations require that study data be maintained by the researcher for a minimum of seven years following the COMPLETION of the

study. The researcher will make every effort to keep your child's records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your child's records (for instance, if the researcher had reason to believe that your child or someone else was in danger). The following people or groups may review your child's study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

The Researcher and any member of her research team The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies. Federal and state agencies that oversee or review research

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. The researcher will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.

**Study Participation and Early Withdrawal:** You or your child could decide to withdraw them from this study at any time for any reason with no penalty or loss of benefit to which you or your child are entitled. If either you or your child decides to withdraw from this study, the information that your child has already provided will be kept confidential.

**The researcher can withdraw the subject:** Also, the researcher may take your child out of this study without your permission. This may happen because:  
The researcher thinks it is in your child's best interest, Other administrative reasons.

**What are the risks of taking part in this research study?** If your child is interviewed, and feels challenged by answering the questions, they can tell the interviewer at any time if they want to take a break or stop the interview. Your child always has the option not to answer any questions that makes them feel uncomfortable.

**Loss of Confidentiality:** The main risk of allowing the researcher to use and store your child's information for research is a potential loss of privacy. The researcher will protect your child's privacy by labeling his/her information with a code and keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?** There are no direct benefits to your child from taking part in this research. By taking part in the study, your child may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. The researcher will share the study findings with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something in study that could help Sole Train to continue doing the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years.

**Will I be paid to do this study?** No, you and your child will not be paid to be in this study.

**If I have any questions or concerns about this research study, who can I talk to? Contacts:** If you have any questions about this study, or if you absolutely do not want your child to take part, please contact the researcher, Kristen Chipman Machon, as soon as possible. Researcher: Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121  
Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com You can also contact the researcher's faculty advisor at any time. Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080  
Email: baltzell@bu.edu If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to

Speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University IRB directly at 617-358-6115. Thank you!!

### Appendix C: Consent and Assent forms

**Study Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group **IRB Protocol Number:** 4131E **Consent Form Valid Date:** 06/22/16 **Study Expiration Date:** 06/21/17

In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman Machon

Description of Subject Population: Sole Train participants, ages 18–20, Sole Train adult coaches

Version Date: 05/16/2016

#### Verbal Consent Form

I am Kristen Chipman Machon, a doctoral student at Boston University's School of Education studying Sport Psychology.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about your experience with Sole Train. You are being asked to take part because you were involved in the Sole Train program during the 2015–2016 academic year. This research is unfunded, and will be the basis of the researcher's dissertation. Up to 30 people (Sole Train youth participants and adult coaches) will take part in this study. If you agree to take part, I will interview you today over the phone for about 30 minutes. Interview questions will focus on your experiences with Sole Train. Our interview today will be on speakerphone because interviews will be audiotaped. It will not be possible to identify you from the tape (I will not ask you to state your name or any identifying information on the tapes). These tapes will be labeled with codes, not names. A key to the code will connect subjects' names to their audiotapes; I will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able to see the tapes. I will keep the records of this study confidential by keeping any hard copies locked in my home office; only I will have access to these. Any electronic materials related to this study will be kept on my computer; all electronic files will be password protected. Please note, federal regulations require that study data be maintained by the researcher for a minimum of seven years following the COMPLETION of the study. I will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records. I would only have to share information about you if you were in serious danger, or if I found out that somebody else was in serious danger.

The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

Me and any member of her research team. The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies. Federal and state agencies that oversee or review research.

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. I will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.



**Study Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group **IRB Protocol Number:** 4131E **Consent Form Valid Date:** 06/22/16 **Study Expiration Date:** 06/21/17

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free to decide to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential.

If you are interviewed, and feel challenged by answering questions while talking with me, you can tell me at any time if you want to take a break or stop the interview. You always have the option not to answer any questions that makes you feel uncomfortable. The main risk to you is a potential loss of privacy. I will protect your privacy by labeling your information with a code, and by keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer. By taking part in the study, you may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. I will share study findings with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something in study that could help Sole Train to continue doing the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years. You will not be paid to be in this study. I appreciate your time!! If you have any questions about this study, you can talk with me (Kristen Chipman Machon) at any time. If you'd like it, I can share my contact information with you, but it (and my advisor's information) is on the hand out that you were given when you expressed an interest in the study.

\*I can read these aloud if they want to write them down:

Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121 Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080 Email: baltzell@bu.edu **Please say now whether you agree to move forward with the interview and be a part of the study.**

Protocol Title: In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group  
Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman  
Description of Subject Population: Youth/teens ages 10–17  
Version Date: 05/16/2016

### **Verbal Assent Form**

**What is a Research Study?** Research studies help us to learn new things and test new ideas. People who work on research studies are called researchers. During research studies, the researchers collect a lot of information so that they can learn more about something. I am Kristen Chipman Machon, a student from Boston University. I am asking you to be a part of a study to learn more about your time with Sole Train. I am asking you join this study because were a part of Sole Train during this (the 2015–2016) school year. There are a few things you should know about this study:

You get to decide if you want to be in the study You can say 'No' or 'Yes' Whatever you

decide is OK If you say 'Yes' now, you can change your mind and say 'No' later No one will be upset if you say 'No' You can ask the researcher questions at any time.

If you decide to be in this study, you will participate in an interview about Sole Train during this phone call. We would talk about your experiences with Sole Train for about 30 minutes. I will audiotape our interview. I will put us on speakerphone to record our talk. This will help me to remember what we talked about. Some of the interview questions could make you think or seem hard to answer. You can take your time and I can help explain any questions or answer questions that you might have. I will be the only one to know about your answers, so you will not have to feel worried or embarrassed about the things that you say. Being in this study will not help you. By taking part in the study, you may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. I'll share what I learn from the study with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something from the study that could help Sole Train continue to do the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years.

**Study Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group **IRB Protocol Number:** 4131E **Consent Form Valid Date:** 06/22/16 **Study Expiration Date:** 06/21/17

You won't be paid to be in this study. I really appreciate your time, though! I do not plan to share your name or other information about you if you join this study. However, there is a small chance that other people could find out your information. I will do my best to make sure that doesn't happen. I would only have to share information about you if you were in serious danger, or if I found out that somebody else was in serious danger. You do not have to take part in this research study. You can say 'Yes' or 'No'. You can say 'Yes' now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me that you want to stop. No one will be mad if you don't want to take part in the study or if you change your mind about taking part in the study. Your parent or guardian can also decide to have you stop taking part in this study—that is OK too. If you have any questions about this study, you can talk with me (Kristen Chipman Machon) at any time. If you'd like it, I can share my contact information with you, but it (and my advisor's information) is on the hand out that you were given when you expressed an interest in the study.

\*I can read these aloud if they want to write them down:

Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121 Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080 Email: baltzell@bu.edu **Please say now whether you agree to move forward with the interview and be part of the study.**

In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group  
Principal Investigator: Kristen Chipman Machon  
Description of Subject Population: Sole Train participants, ages 18–20, Sole Train adult coaches (this is actually the parental consent form)  
Version Date: 05/16/2016

### **Verbal Consent Form**

I am Kristen Chipman Machon, a doctoral student at Boston University's School of Education studying Sport Psychology.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about your child's experience with Sole Train. Your child is being asked to take part because they were involved in the Sole Train program during the 2015–2016 academic year. This research is unfunded, and will be the basis of the researcher's dissertation. Up to 30 people (Sole Train youth participants and adult coaches) will take part in this study. If you agree to have your child take part, I will interview them today over the phone for about 30 minutes. Interview questions will focus on their experiences with Sole Train. Our interview today will be on speakerphone because interviews will be audiotaped. It will not be possible to identify your child from the tape (I will not ask you to state your name or any identifying information on the tapes). These tapes will be labeled with codes, not names. A key to

the code will connect subjects' names to their audiotapes; I will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able to see the tapes. I will keep the records of this study confidential by keeping any hard copies locked in my home office; only I will have access to these. Any electronic materials related to this study will be kept on my computer; all electronic files will be password protected. Please note, federal regulations require that study data be maintained by the researcher for a minimum of seven years following the COMPLETION of the study. I will make every effort to keep your child's records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records. I would only have to share information about you if you were in serious danger, or if I found out that somebody else was in serious danger. The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

Me and any member of her research team. The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies. Federal and state agencies that oversee or review research.

**Study Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group **IRB Protocol Number:** 4131E **Consent Form Valid Date:** 06/22/16 **Study Expiration Date:** 06/21/17

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. I will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.

Allowing your child to take part in this study is your choice. You are free to decide to withdraw your child at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential.

The main risk to your child is a potential loss of privacy. I will protect their privacy by labeling their information with a code, and by keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer. By taking part in the study, your child may be helping Sole Train, and the young people who take part in Sole Train in the future. I will share study findings with those in charge of Sole Train. Those people may learn something in study that could help Sole Train to continue doing the good things that they do, or that could make the program even better for young people in coming years. You/your child will not be paid to be in this study. I appreciate their time!! If you have any questions about this study, you can talk with me (Kristen Chipman Machon) at any time. If you'd like it, I can share my contact information with you, but it (and my advisor's information) is on the hand out that you were given when your child expressed an interest in the study.

\*I can read these aloud if they want to write them down:

Kristen Chipman Machon Phone: 508-209-7121 Email: kchipman@bu.edu Alternate email: kristenechipman@yahoo.com Advisor: Dr. Amy Baltzell Phone: 617-358-1080 Email: baltzell@bu.edu **Please say now whether you agree to move forward with the interview and allow your child to be a part of the study.**

## **Appendix D: Interview Protocols**

Kristen Chipman Machon

Submitted (to Boston University's Institutional Review Board): 07/28/16

**Protocol Title:** In Their Shoes: Coaches' and Participants' Perceived Experiences with a Running/Youth Development Group

### Sole Train Coach Interviews

#### **Demographic information for Sole Train Coaches (to be asked prior to interview questions)**

1) What was your main reason for becoming a Sole Train coach (for instance, did you know someone involved in the program, do you love to run, are you interested in youth development/working with young people, is there another reason?):

2) Age:

3) Gender:

4) *Sole Train* site:

5) Race/Ethnicity:

6) How important was it to you that participants in your groups completed **the half marathon or five-mile race at the end of the program?**

**(Would you say that it was VERY IMPORTANT, SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, NEUTRAL, SOMEWHAT UNIMPORTANT, or NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL?)**

7) How would you rate your Sole Train experience? **(Would you say it was VERY POSITIVE, SOMEWHAT POSITIVE, NEUTRAL, SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE, or VERY NEGATIVE?)**

**Interview guide for Sole Train coaches:**

1) \*Main question: Tell me your “Sole Train story.”

\*More specific questions:

- 1) Tell me why you decided to start as a coach with Sole Train.
- 2) Tell me what your main goals as a Sole Train coach this year were.
- 2) Tell me about your best day at Sole Train.
- 3) Tell me about your worst day with Sole Train (what was your hardest moment — what made you come back/stick with coaching?).
- 4) Tell me a little bit about how you aimed to treat the Sole Train participants. If you had to give me adjectives to describe how you treated your participants, what would you say?
- 5) Tell me about the type of atmosphere you aimed to create at your Sole Train site (did you try to make participants feel supported/cared about there? In your opinion, were people at your site kind or unkind to one another?)
- 6) Tell me about the amount of emphasis (if any) you placed on participants forming relationships with other kids.
- 7) Tell me about whether you feel any differently about yourself (emotionally or physically) after coaching Sole Train? How did coaching this year impact you personally (if at all)?
- 8) Tell me about the half marathon or five-mile race experience — how was it for you as a coach? What were the observations you had of your participants during the actual event and on the day of the event?
- 9) How much emphasis did you place on participants completing the half marathon or

five-mile race versus going through the process of training for the school year?

10) Tell me about changes that you saw in participants from the beginning to the end of the program (if you did see any changes).

11) Tell me about whether you observed any other aspects of your participants' lives changing over the course of Sole Train training (for instance, their home lives, their school work, etc.)

12) Looking back, please summarize what (if anything) you learned from coaching Sole Train and what (if anything) being part of the program left you thinking and/or feeling.

13) Please share any other thoughts or feelings on the program that we have not covered.



### Youth Participant Interviews

#### **Demographic information for Sole Train participants (to be asked prior to interview questions)**

1) What was your main reason for joining Sole Train (for instance, were your friends taking part, do you want to lose weight/get healthier, do you love to run, did someone suggest that you take part, is there another reason?):

2) Age:

3) Gender:

4) *Sole Train* site:

5) Race/Ethnicity:

6) Did you complete the five-mile race or the half marathon at the end of the training year?

7) How important was it to you to complete **the half marathon or the five-mile race at the end of the program? (Would you say that it was VERY IMPORTANT, SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, NEUTRAL , SOMEWHAT UNIMPORTANT, NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL?)**

7) Overall, how would you rate your Sole Train experience?

**(Would you say that it was VERY POSITIVE, SOMEWHAT POSITIVE, NEUTRAL , SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE, VERY NEGATIVE?)**

**Interview guide for youth participants:**

1) \*Main question: Tell me your “Sole Train story.”

\*More specific questions:

2) Tell me why you decided to start Sole Train. \*autonomy

3) Tell me about your best day at Sole Train.

4) Tell me about your worst day with Sole Train (what was your hardest moment - how did you get through it)? \*environmental mastery

5) Tell me a little bit about how you were treated by the adults at Sole Train. If you had to give me adjectives (or words to describe) how they treated you, what would you say?

\*caring climate

6) Tell me about the type of atmosphere at your Sole Train site (did you feel supported/cared about there? Were people kind or unkind to one another?) \*caring climate, \*positive interpersonal relations

7) Tell me about whether you feel any differently about yourself (emotionally or physically) after participating in Sole Train? \*self-acceptance, \*personal growth

8) Tell me about your half marathon or five-mile race experience — how was it, did you finish, what were the best and worst parts of taking part in the race? \*autonomy, \*environmental mastery

9) How important was finishing the five-mile race or the half marathon to your Sole Train experience?

10) Talk about whether taking part in Sole Train made you think about who you are and who you can be in the future. Tell me about whether participation made you think about

what you are able to accomplish differently. \*purpose in life

11) What do you think/feel about yourself now that Sole Train is over? \*self-acceptance

12) Looking back, please summarize what (if anything) you learned from Sole Train and what (if anything) being part of the program left you thinking and/or feeling. \*personal growth

13) Please share any other thoughts or feelings that you might have on the program that we have not covered.

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## Curriculum Vitae











