

Lyda Hill
**Institute for
Human Resilience**

resilience.uccs.edu

ANNUAL REPORT



2024

Research | Healing | Community Training & Empowerment



University of Colorado
Colorado Springs



University of Colorado

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Charles C. Benight, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Lyda Hill Institute
for Human Resilience

Executive Summary

This annual report is being completed in the early months of 2025, a time marked by both reflection and profound transition. While 2024 was a year of tremendous success for the [Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience \(the Institute\)](#), recent federal developments have significantly altered the landscape for scientific research funding.

In just a few months, sweeping changes at the federal level have led to the elimination of numerous scientific research grants nationwide, including two major grants awarded to the Institute. Federal agencies such as the NIH, NSF, CDC, and SAMHSA are undergoing major reorganizations and budget reductions, with proposed cuts reaching up to 50%. Additionally, there are concerning proposals to reduce indirect cost rates on federal grants, which are essential to sustaining university-supported research.

This is not to suggest that increasing efficiency within federal systems is unwelcome, it is necessary. However, the current climate poses serious challenges to our future ability to secure major grants that fund discoveries in human resilience and response to extreme adversity. Scientific exploration is a cornerstone of a free society and central to societal resilience.

At the Institute, our mission is clear: By conducting cutting-edge research focused on human resilience, our scientific discoveries will pave the way for tomorrow's breakthroughs in mental health therapies to address the needs of trauma survivors. We remain unwavering in our commitment to this mission, as well as to our direct clinical services supporting Veterans, first responders, trauma survivors, and resilience programming for communities nationwide.

Despite these challenges, we remain resilient. Over the past five years, our work has made a meaningful impact:

- Since 2014, our Veteran Health and Trauma Clinic has served more than 4,000 Veterans and active-duty service members.
- We have gathered promising initial data now for a new model of care for Veterans and other trauma survivors that focuses on healing and not pathology.
- Our faculty and affiliates have published over 400 peer-reviewed scientific papers in leading journals.
- In the summer of 2024, we hosted the inaugural Resilience Science Summit, bringing together top researchers from around the globe (read on for more on the summit).
- More than 5,000 individuals from all 50 states and over 40 countries have completed our GRIT Resilience Coach training.
- We continue to support over 5,000 employees across Colorado through our First Priority Peer Support Program, including a new initiative at our own UCCS campus.
- Our resilience-focused trainings continue to support organizations and communities that recognize the value of investing in the well-being of their people.

The work of the Institute has never been more essential. Amid uncertainty, we are steadfast in our mission - and we will continue to lead, serve, and innovate in resilience science and care.

MISSION

Advancing human resilience to adversity by designing evidence-based solutions through interdisciplinary research, healing therapies, and community training and empowerment

Our vision is to serve as the national model in resilience-based trauma research, healing, and community empowerment solutions.

The Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience has an interwoven three-fold approach to advance human resilience from adversity through Research, Healing, and Community Training & Empowerment.



Research

Transdisciplinary trauma research from a resilience framework that advances scientific knowledge to help individuals, families, communities, and systems.



Healing

An integrated healing experience for those seeking trauma care through and innovative approach.



Community Training & Empowerment

Training and education designed to translate strength-based knowledge to workable resilience resources and programming.

SIGNIFICANT INSTITUTE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HEALING

- Helped 390 Veterans in their healing journey through [Milestones Resilience Care](#) and the [Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic](#).
- Did an initial evaluation on the efficacy of Milestones Resilience Care that indicates this model of care is highly effective for overcoming traumatic stress.

RESEARCH

- Hosted the first [Resilience Science Summit](#), which brought together trauma and resilience experts from around the globe to collectively discuss the state of the field and the most impactful directions forward.
- Drs. Benight and Littleton initiated federally funded research projects that will help to understand the psychology of trauma and resilience.

COMMUNITY TRAINING & EMPOWERMENT

- Hosted the first annual [GRIT Conference](#), with nearly 400 registrants, to embrace and celebrate resilience within our community.
- Began a [Peer Support program](#) to assist UCCS Faculty and Staff in navigating workplace stress and trauma.
- Provided resilience trainings to organizations employing more than 10,000 individuals.



OUR TEAM



Charles C. Benight, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Heather Littleton, Ph.D.
Director of Research
Operations



Brooks Robinson, Ph.D.
Program Director,
Grants Specialist



Gabe Taylor
Communications Specialist



Eva Perez
Program Administrator



Nicole Weis, MA, LPC, LAC
Director of Healing and
Community Programs



Elyse Dunckley
Finance Manager and
Research Administrator



John Cooke
Business Services Assistant



Carolyn Yeager, Ph.D.
Manager of Technology,
Integration, and Support



Valerie Anderson, Psy.D.
Technology Innovation
Expert Consultant

OUR TEAM



Bernard Ricca, Ph.D.
Research Associate
Professor



Timothy Doenges, Ph.D.
Staff Psychologist



Lauren Shaw, Psy.D.
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Clinician, Clinical Research
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Amy Huntington Hollis
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Erin Fowler, MA, LPC
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Justin D. Lincoln, Psy.D.
Program Director for
Outdoor Immersion



Megan Kelly
Project Manager for
HFBF Project



Shannon Everett, MA, LPC
Clinical Therapist, Community
Support Specialist



Joanna Polk
Milestones Care Coordinator



Jodi Savino
Billing & Authorization
Coordinator

RESEARCH



SUMMARY

The [Research Division](#) at the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) continues to pioneer scientific exploration into the underpinnings of psychological trauma and resilience. The Institute now boasts [60 research affiliates](#) from across the world passionate about human resilience. Institute faculty and affiliates published 185 peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters, and official conference proceeding articles in the past year, demonstrating a significant impact on the field. And the Institute hosted the first [Resilience Science Summit](#), bringing experts from around the world to Colorado Springs to map out the future of resilience science.

Another crucial aspect of the Research Division is receiving funding from external grant agencies to support our scientific enterprise. The Institute continued to build on the solid foundation of grant and sponsored project infrastructure laid down over the past 4 years. In the past year, 8 different primary investigators submitted 17 grants requesting just under \$6 million. Grants were submitted to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Defense, Department of Education, Colorado Springs Health Foundation, and Region 16 Opioid Council among other organizations. Five grants were awarded to Institute investigators with several more awaiting final decision. Of particular note, two major federal applications were scored well within the funding zone but are in limbo due to the recent budget cuts for research at the NIH and NSF.

The Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience is dedicated to scientific discovery related to human resilience and innovation of care models that support the human capacity to overcome, rather than reducing survivors to a set of medical symptoms. The Institute's research has a direct impact in the development and realization of therapies that are improving the quality of life and outcomes of trauma survivors.

RESILIENCE SCIENCE SUMMIT

Pioneering the Future of Resilience: Insights from the 2024 Resilience Science Summit



In July 2024, the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) hosted the [Resilience Science Summit](#) in downtown Colorado Springs, bringing together a diverse group of leading scientists from across the world to advance the understanding of trauma and resilience. The summit aimed to foster collaboration among experts to develop innovative solutions to some of the most pressing questions in the field, with the overarching goal of improving outcomes for individuals and communities affected by trauma.

The two-day event featured a dynamic lineup of renowned scientists in resilience research. Presentations spanned a wide array of topics and planned diversity of opinions. All highlighted both groundbreaking discoveries and practical applications in the field.

[Alison Holman, PhD](#), Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Personnel at the University of California Irvine, shared her research on the long-term health effects of collective trauma, offering insights into how large-scale events like pandemics or natural disasters impact physical and mental health over time. [Andres Maercker, MD, PhD](#), Professor, and Division Head at the University of Zurich, discussed the role of cultural influences on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and resilience, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural contexts in both research and intervention.

Child resilience expert [Ann Masten, PhD](#), Regents Professor and Distinguished McKnight University Professor at the University of Minnesota presented her latest findings on how children adapt to adversity and the key protective factors that support positive outcomes. [Annette La Greca, PhD](#), Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics, and Cooper Fellow and Provost Scholar at the University of Miami explored the impact of disasters on youth mental health, providing evidence-based strategies to support children and adolescents following traumatic events.

[David Pincus, PhD](#), Professor at Chapman University introduced innovative models of flexibility in stress responses, showing how dynamic systems theory can inform resilience-building strategies. [Josef Ruzek, PhD](#), Research Professor at the Institute and Palo Alto University highlighted the latest advancements in early interventions for trauma, emphasizing the importance of timely and accessible care to prevent long-term distress.

Community-based approaches were also a focal point of the summit. [Katie Edwards, PhD](#), Professor at University of Michigan examined strategies for reducing interpersonal violence

through community engagement and prevention programs, while Head of Research for Phoenix Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, [Meaghan O'Donnell, PhD](#), discussed recovery trajectories following traumatic injury and the critical role of social support networks. [Melissa Walls, PhD](#), Professor at the Bloomberg School of Public Health Johns Hopkins University, provided a powerful perspective on indigenous approaches to resilience and healing, underscoring the need to integrate culturally informed practices into mainstream interventions.

Beyond the presentations, the summit fostered valuable networking and collaborative opportunities. Attendees participated in breakout sessions, panel discussions, and interactive workshops designed to spark new ideas and partnerships. The event's interdisciplinary approach underscored the importance of bridging scientific research with community practice to create holistic and effective solutions.

The Resilience Science Summit marked a significant step forward in the collective effort to advance resilience science. The Institute remains at the forefront of this mission, promoting resilience through interdisciplinary research, healing therapies, and community training. As the field continues to grow, the insights and collaborations forged at the summit will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping the future of trauma-informed care and resilience interventions.



ACTIVE RESEARCH

IRIS Study: Psychological Recovery from Traumatic Injury

The [Injury Recovery Improvement Study \(IRIS\)](#), a 3-year, \$787,125 grant from the National Science Foundation, examines how individuals cope with and recover from traumatic physical injuries. Its overarching goal is to refine theoretical models of posttraumatic adaptation, particularly Self-Regulation Shift Theory (SRST), a theory developed by Dr. Benight. This theory posits that perceptions of one's coping capacity combined with the beliefs related to future recovery outcomes influence upward or downward critical shifts in functioning.

IRIS aims to advance this understanding by (a) identifying “tipping points,” where small changes lead to significant shifts in recovery; (b) detecting “early warning signals” that predict these shifts; and (c) analyzing recovery trajectories by examining the timing and frequency of these critical shifts throughout the recovery process. IRIS will track 300 injury survivors over 3 months to accomplish these goals. The study is unique in its integration of biological, voice recordings, and twice daily momentary check-ins to capture the coping process. This is the first study of its kind to help uncover the coping dynamics in order to assist in developing future real-time interventions to support patients in their recovery.



Empowering LGBTQ+ Teens and Parents: Dr. Heather Littleton Leads NIH-Funded Prevention Program

Dr. Heather Littleton is the Principal Investigator of

a three-year, \$625,000 NIH grant to develop and conduct an initial pilot trial of the [Healthy Families Bright Futures \(HFBF\)](#) program. The HFBF program is an online group-based dating violence and alcohol use prevention program for LGBTQ+ teens and their parents. The program builds on a successful teen only program called [PRYSHM \(Promoting Youth with Strong Hearts and Minds\)](#). Both programs were developed with [Dr. Katie Edwards of the University of Michigan](#), with Dr. Edwards serving as the lead developer of the PRYSHM program and Dr. Littleton serving as lead developer of the HFBF program. What sets these programs apart from other prevention programs is that they are tailored for LGBTQ+ teens, who face increased risk of both dating violence and alcohol use. Specifically, HFBF not only includes evidence-based alcohol and dating violence prevention skills for teens and parents but also is designed to increase teens' positive sense of identity and increase parents' ability to support their teens.



The research team for the HFBF program recently completed an initial pilot of the program with six families. Families overall rated the program very highly, and parents in particular appreciated the ability to connect with other parents of LGBTQ+ teens in the program. In January, they launched a pilot randomized trial of the program, where half of the families enrolled will complete the program right away and half will complete the program after they complete all the study assessments. The plan is to enroll between 60 and 80 families in this pilot trial. In addition to assessing whether the program decreases teen's risk for alcohol use and dating violence, they also will evaluate its impact on parental support and monitoring of their teen, as well as teen self-efficacy around things like communicating with their dating partners and refusing alcohol. Positive findings of this initial trial will support seeking funding for a larger trial of the program with a longer-term follow-up, and ultimately dissemination of the program to LGBTQ+ centers and [PFLAGs](#) (support organization for friends and loved ones of LGBTQ+ individuals).



SUMMARY

The [Healing Division](#) is a pillar of support for the Pikes Peak Region, offering two distinct pathways of care. [The Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic](#), founded in 2014, offers evidence-based psychotherapy to trauma survivors with a particular emphasis on Veterans and first responders.

[Milestones Resilience Care](#), launched in 2023, is an innovative healing model that approaches trauma recovery in a non-

medicalized approach by focusing on the whole person to help them regain a sense of balance and strength. Medicalized approaches often struggle with stigmatization and high drop-out rates. Through [trauma-informed services](#) that include evidence-based trauma psychotherapy, acupuncture, massage, yoga, art therapy, equine and llama therapy, and outdoor immersion programs, the team works to restore physical well-being, emotional balance, purpose and meaning, and connectedness with others. Among trauma survivors utilizing our services, nearly 400 Veterans, first responders, and other trauma survivors received care at the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience in 2024 alone. Healing services are poised to continue expanding in the years ahead as the Institute strives to provide the best care to trauma survivors in the country.

The Healing division helps individuals recover from psychological challenges associated with military service, natural disaster, domestic violence, auto accidents, sexual assault, and a wide range of other stressors and traumas.

Clinical Services Overview

VHTC	
Clients Served	
New Clients - 52	52
Returning Clients - 118	118
Total Client Services	7,506
Milestones (Since Opening)	
Clients Enrolled - 46	46
Clients Completed - 30	30
Total Sessions - 1354	1,354
CREATE Classes	
CREATE Participants	57
	450+

MILESTONES BUILDING EVIDENCE

Milestones Resilience Care Pilot Program

The Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) partnered with the state-funded [Next Chapter](#) pilot program for suicide prevention to provide military Veterans with innovative healing through [Milestones Resilience Care](#). Initial evaluation data for Veterans completing Milestones are very positive.

We are demonstrating significant reductions in PTSD, depression, anxiety, pain, and loneliness, as well as increases in coping self-efficacy, resilience, social connection and enhanced ability to not commit suicide. With these promising initial results, the Institute is preparing for a full Randomized Control Trial for Milestones Resilience Care. The goal is to build the requisite evidence base that will create reimbursable options supporting Milestones as an important alternative to medical-centric approaches.

Milestones Resilience Care Offered in Collaboration with Strata Med at Garden of the Gods Resort & Club



Milestones Resilience Care is now working collaboratively with [Strata Med at Garden of the Gods Resort & Club](#) to offer their clients with the opportunity to heal from trauma. This unique public/private partnership creates critical options for hundreds of employees served by Strata Med to be able to receive innovative trauma healing through the Milestones Model.

VETERANS TRAUMA COURT

Colorado's 4th Judicial District Veterans Trauma Court Enhancement: Trauma-Informed Interventions During Early Stages of VTC Program

Since January 2024, the Institute has partnered with the [Colorado 4th Judicial District's Veterans Trauma Court \(VTC\)](#). The VTC program serves justice-involved military Veterans by offering treatment and resources as an alternative to traditional judicial punishments. Funded by the [Bureau of Justice Assistance](#), the current partnership between the Institute and the VTC focuses on enhancing the intake assessment process to more quickly and effectively identify and respond to Veterans' needs.

To guide this effort, the Institute conducted a comprehensive needs assessment that gathered input from staff, program participants, volunteers, and community partners. Based on this feedback, the Institute team designed a new intake assessment process using an instrument developed by [American University](#), launching the updated process in July 2024. Since then, the team has administered the assessment to all potential program participants (18 as of this writing) and has continuously refined both the assessment and report writing processes based on ongoing feedback from the VTC program judge, attorneys, and program coordinator. At [Judge Shakes](#)' request, the team also developed a proposed plan to address the potential death of program participants, with the goal of honoring the impact on participants and staff while identifying opportunities to improve services.

Looking ahead, the team is developing a next-step assessment that will incorporate formal cognitive and personality evaluations. With over 90% of VTC participants reporting a history of traumatic brain injury (TBI), cognitive challenges can significantly affect Veterans' understanding of and adherence to program requirements. The new assessment will help identify the most appropriate treatments for each Veteran and recommend the format and language best suited to their needs. This Institute-based work not only enhances the VTC program but also provides Clinical PhD trauma students with valuable hands-on experience in a trauma-focused treatment court setting.

UCCS CAMPUS SUPPORT

Making a More Resilient Campus

Throughout 2024, the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) remained an invaluable resource for UCCS, addressing critical mental health challenges and fostering a stronger sense of community on campus.

UCCS faculty and staff actively participated in numerous [CREATE offerings](#), strengthening both personal and campus-wide resilience while forging closer connections with colleagues. Originally launched in 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cultivating Resilience and Empowering Adaptation Through Expression (CREATE) program has played a vital role in building resilience across campus. In 2024, the program continued to provide meaningful experiences, offering 57 CREATE sessions that have become a cherished part of faculty and staff life.

Additionally, many faculty and staff engaged in the Institute's [GRIT training](#) and the 2024 GRIT Conference, gaining skills to serve as GRIT Coaches. These individuals now play a crucial role in supporting their families, colleagues, and communities during times of adversity. Today, 323 GRIT Coaches are active within the UCCS community.

Following the tragic campus shooting in February 2024, which claimed the lives of two young individuals, the Institute provided essential counseling services to students, faculty, and staff. Dr. Charles Benight, Executive Director of the Institute, provided support to UCCS leadership throughout the emergency response and for the recovery in the wake of the tragedy.



The Institute also launched [Peer Support training for UCCS faculty and staff](#), adapting its [First Priority Peer Support program](#) to better serve the campus. Dozens of faculty and staff have completed the training, equipping them to recognize when a colleague is struggling and provide appropriate support.

Through these initiatives, the Institute continues to strengthen the UCCS community, fostering resilience and well-being across campus.

STUDENT CLINICAL TRAINING

The Important Role of Clinical Training at the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience

At the Institute, clinical hours are more than just a graduation requirement - they are a cornerstone of preparing the next generation of trauma-informed mental health clinicians. In 2024 alone, 275 individuals applied to the [Clinical PhD program with a trauma emphasis](#) that was developed by the Institute founder, Dr. Charles Benight. The Institute provides critical support to this program in a multitude of ways. First, the Institute provides financial support for students totaling \$90,000 per year through an endowment from [Lyda Hill Philanthropies](#). Second, the Institute faculty provide critical research mentorship and funding through research grants. And third, the [Healing Division](#) at the Institute provides essential clinical training for master's and Ph.D. students specializing in trauma psychology. Here, clinical hours take on deep significance, equipping students with real-world experience in trauma-focused psychotherapy and psychological assessment.

These clinical hours are not just an academic exercise, they are the bridge between theory and practice. They allow students to build the critical skills and confidence needed to address the increasing demand for trauma-informed care in the community. With mental health professionals facing record levels of burnout and the number of qualified trauma specialists falling short of demand, these carefully guided training experiences are vital to filling the widening gap in services.

Beyond student development, the impact of these clinical hours ripple throughout the region. By offering accessible, evidence-based care to Veterans and other trauma survivors, students contribute directly to the mental well-being of vulnerable populations. Our clinics foster a culture of continuous learning and clinical excellence, ensuring that students have the foundation they need as they move into their clinical internships.



COMMUNITY TRAINING & EMPOWERMENT

WORKFORCE THRIVE ENHANCING WORKPLACE RESILIENCE

In 2025, the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) will launch WorkforceThrive, a new initiative designed to address the growing need for workforce resilience. With increasing awareness of workplace mental health challenges, organizations are seeking more effective ways to support employees. WorkforceThrive provides a structured approach to enhancing workplace well-being, offering a comprehensive system that addresses both organizational and individual resilience.

Planning for WorkforceThrive began in early 2024 based on discussions with business leaders in the Pikes Peak region. This initiative is built on a three-tiered framework aimed at providing scalable solutions to workplace stress, trauma, and burnout. The first tier, Workplace Resilience, focuses on strengthening collective resilience by equipping teams with tools and strategies to manage stress and adapt to challenges. The second tier, Resilience Enhancement, offers training programs designed to build a culture of peer support and mental well-being. The third tier, Individual Recovery, provides direct support for employees in crisis, ensuring they receive timely and specialized care.

As organizations continue to navigate an evolving work environment, WorkforceThrive represents a significant step forward in integrating resilience-building strategies into the workplace. Unlike traditional Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which are often underutilized and narrowly focused, this initiative takes a proactive and comprehensive approach that includes resilience development, evidence-based programs, digital resources, and targeted clinical support. WorkforceThrive will provide employers with practical solutions to enhance workforce strength and well-being. As the Institute moves toward engagement with private businesses and our non-profit community, this initiative underscores a broader commitment to fostering resilience at both the individual and organizational levels, ultimately contributing to healthier, more sustainable workplaces.



PEER SUPPORT

In 2024, the Institute launched the Peer Support Program at UCCS, aiming to strengthen the university community's ability to navigate stressful situations. Over the past year, 30 faculty and staff members have undergone specialized training to serve as Peer Supporters, equipping them with the skills needed to offer guidance, encouragement, and a compassionate presence to their colleagues. The program was introduced in response to a growing recognition of the importance of mental health and well-being, especially in the wake of the tragic February 19 shootings on campus, which underscored the urgent need for accessible emotional support.

The Peer Support program is built on a foundation of social resilience, which research has shown to be one of the most effective ways to cope with stress, adversity, and trauma. Peer Supporters provide a safe space for their peers to express concerns, share their experiences, and access critical resources without fear of judgment. This model not only enhances emotional well-being but also strengthens the overall sense of community at UCCS, ensuring that no one must face difficult times alone.

Beyond the university, the Institute has continued to expand its existing Peer Support Programs, providing services to both the [Colorado Department of Transportation \(CDOT\)](#) and UCHealth Southern Region during 2024. These programs have now grown to include over 200 Peer Supporters, collectively serving more than 5,000 employees throughout Colorado. By embedding Peer Support within these large organizations, the Institute continues to have an impact on reducing stress and burnout in high-stress environments creating systems that offer immediate and meaningful support from colleagues who understand their unique challenges.

Through these efforts, the Institute remains dedicated to promoting psychological resilience and fostering a culture where seeking support is encouraged, accessible, and effective. As the demand for mental health resources continues to rise, the Peer Support Program stands as a vital initiative, helping organizations and employees build strength and connection in the face of adversity.

[Click here for more information on the Peer Support program!](#)



GRIT

Over the past year, the [GRIT \(Greater Resilience Information Toolkit\)](#) has continued to expand in many exciting ways, reaching more communities and enhancing its offerings. The Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) collaborated with the Language Department at UCCS to translate all the GRIT trainings into Spanish, making it more accessible for our Spanish speaking communities. This translation effort is just the beginning, as there are plans to continue expanding GRIT into additional languages, ensuring that more people can benefit from its valuable resources. By breaking language barriers, GRIT aims to serve more diverse populations.



Meanwhile, the [web-app, GRIT-e](#), has continued its rapid expansion, offering skills and resources on demand. This digital platform allows users to engage with GRIT content whenever and wherever they need it, making personal growth and resilience-building more accessible than ever. Through regular updates and improvements, GRIT-e continues to evolve, incorporating new tools and interactive features that enhance user engagement and effectiveness.

In addition to its digital advancements, GRIT has also forged meaningful partnerships, including a collaboration with [Pikes Peak Rising 360](#), a pilot project launched through the leadership of the El Paso County Public Health Department supports regional efforts to improve mental health and well-being throughout El Paso County. Pikes Peak Rising 360 serves as an online, web-based platform offering thousands of expert-vetted resources, including GRIT, along with scientifically validated assessments designed to accommodate different learning styles. This partnership is a crucial step in expanding GRIT's reach and ensuring that more individuals have access to quality mental health and resilience-building tools.

Lastly, the Institute is actively developing a new GRIT module called GRIT-Tribe, which features culturally relevant curriculum specifically designed for Native American women. This initiative recognizes the importance of culturally tailored resources in promoting resilience and well-being within indigenous communities. By addressing the unique challenges and strengths of Native American women, GRIT-Tribe aims to provide a supportive and empowering framework for personal and collective growth. With these exciting developments, the GRIT program, now in 40 countries around the world, continues to evolve, ensuring that the mission of fostering resilience and well-being reaches even more individuals and communities.

GRIT CONFERENCE

Successful First GRIT Conference

On March 11th of 2024, the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) hosted the [GRIT: Resiliency in Action Conference](#) at the Ent Center for the Arts on the UCCS Campus, our first GRIT conference. The free, one-day event, which was made possible with a grant from [El Paso County](#) and supported with ARPA funding, served as a gathering place for fostering a deeper understanding of resilience, promoting teamwork, and embracing the core principles of the [Greater Resilience Information Toolkit \(GRIT\) program](#). The conference brought together community members, mental health professionals, educators, and GRIT Coaches to explore how resilience can be cultivated and applied across various aspects of life.

The day began with an introduction from [Dr. Charles Benight](#), Executive Director of the Institute, who set the tone by emphasizing the importance of resilience in today's world. He highlighted the Institute's ongoing mission to empower individuals and communities with the tools needed to navigate adversity. He also discussed how his personal journey surviving Hurricane Andrew when he and his wife were expecting their first child provided the impetus to help those experiencing trauma and disasters.

Throughout the day, keynote speakers Olympians [Hunter Kemper](#) and [Amy Van Dyken](#), in addition to previous District Attorney Mark Yarbrough discussed their personal experiences with serious life adversities through the frame of resilience. One of the conference's most anticipated moments was the keynote address by six-time Olympic gold medalist Amy Van Dyken. Van Dyken shared her powerful journey of overcoming a life-altering spinal cord injury, offering an inspiring message of perseverance and the critical

role resilience played in her recovery. Her story resonated deeply with the audience, underscoring the transformative power of a resilient mindset in the face of profound challenges.

Throughout the day, attendees engaged in thought-provoking discussions and activities designed to reinforce the principles of the GRIT Program. Participants gained valuable information, but also encouragement on how to apply what they learned to their own lives and communities.

The conference concluded with closing remarks from [Nicole Weis](#), Director of Healing and Community Programs at the Institute. She emphasized the importance of ongoing resilience training and the need to build supportive networks to help individuals thrive in the face of adversity.

The Institute remains committed to providing resources and training programs aimed at strengthening the resilience of individuals and communities. The GRIT program continues to serve as a powerful tool for equipping people with the skills needed to navigate life's challenges. For more information on upcoming events, training opportunities, and resources, visit the [GRIT website](#) or the [Institute's official website](#).





INSTITUTE TECHNOLOGY

Overview

In 2024, the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) achieved significant technological advancements, including the enhancement of the PULSE software for comprehensive mental health assessments, the launch of the [GRIT-e application](#) to support resilience coaches globally, and a positive evaluation of [Milestones Resilience Care](#)'s Next Chapter partnership, which improved clients' psychological, social, and physical well-being. These efforts underscore the Institute's commitment to leveraging technology to foster resilience and well-being. Future initiatives include automated assessment scheduling, text messaging integration, and updates to GRIT-e for educational support.

PULSE: Psychological Understanding and Life Satisfaction Evaluation

Throughout 2024, the technology team continued to support and enhance the Institute-designed software assessment system known as PULSE. This innovative application is designed to improve the quality and ease of mental health assessments by integrating psychological insights with real-time life satisfaction data, providing a comprehensive view of individual well-being. PULSE empowers clinicians to make more informed, personalized treatment decisions, ultimately improving patient outcomes and transforming mental health care.

Over the past year, PULSE has been successfully utilized in both the Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic and Milestones Resilience Care at the Institute, offering valuable feedback on client progress. In response to user requests, the Technology

PULSE

Integration Group implemented several enhancements to PULSE in 2024. Notably, customized reporting was improved to offer better visualization of results and percentage changes over time. The updated reports now feature clearer, detailed graphical representations of an individual's well-being across customizable categories. Scores are displayed as gauges, accompanied by recommendations and a history of past results, all in one location to improve overall understanding. Additionally, personalized, evidence-based suggestions for improving psychological well-being are provided, tailored to each client's score. Scores for each measure in every assessment are recorded and graphed, allowing for a visual history of the client's progress toward their goals (see Figure 1).

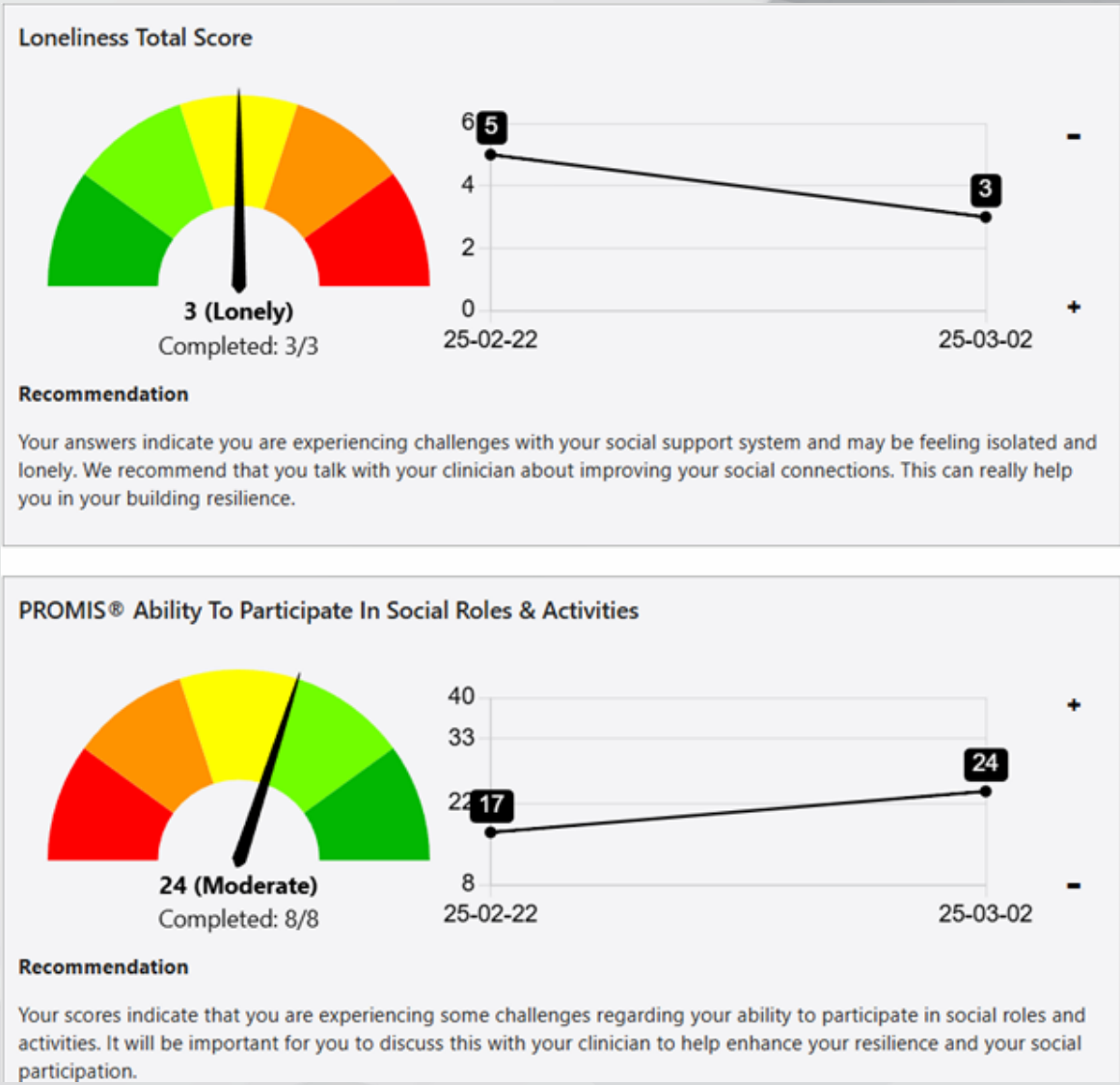


Figure 1: Comprehensive visualization of results, history, and customized clinic-defined recommendations, all grouped in one location based on client results.

PULSE - CONTINUED

The summary section was updated to provide a comprehensive overview of all measures included in the assessment, grouped by category (e.g., pillars of resilience), detailing the history of scores along with percentage changes over time. An example is illustrated in Figure 2.

Summary

Category	Measure	Score		% Change
		25-02-22	25-03-02	
Connectedness	Loneliness Total Score	5	3	33%
Connectedness	PROMIS® Ability to Participate in Social Roles & Activities	17	24	22%
Connectedness	Psychological Well-Being - Positive Relations	7	9	11%
Physical Well-Being	Alcohol Use Disorder (AUDIT-C)		2	0%
Physical Well-Being	Drug Abuse Screen Test (DAST-10)		2	0%
Physical Well-Being	Pain: Brief Pain Inventory	77	55	20%
Physical Well-Being	Sleep: Insomnia Severity Index	19	14	18%
Psychological Strength	Anxiety (GAD-7) Score	14	7	33%
Psychological Strength	CDC HRQOL-4 Unhealthy Days Total	29	24	5%

Figure 2: Summary section provides an overview of all measures included in the assessment and changes over time.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

MILESTONES RESILIENCE CARE



Next Chapter Client Outcomes

The Technology Integration Group conducted a thorough evaluation of the [Milestones Resilience Care's Next Chapter](#) partnership. The evaluation revealed significant positive outcomes in enhancing clients' psychological, social, and physical well-being. Notable improvements were observed in resilience, social connections, and physical health. Clients reported better coping mechanisms, reduced symptoms of PTSD, and increased social connection. Additionally, the program demonstrated significant reductions in anxiety and depression, with trends towards reduced pain and improved sleep quality.

Overall, the Milestones program effectively supports trauma survivors through a holistic approach, integrating mental, social, and physical health interventions to foster comprehensive recovery. These findings underscore the initial success of Milestones Resilience Care in promoting the well-being of its clients.



GRIT-E COACHING APPLICATION

In March 2024, the Technology Integration Group launched the [GRIT-e mobile-web application](#) to enhance the GRIT (Greater Resilience Information Toolkit) training developed by the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute). GRIT-e is designed to support and connect GRIT Coaches globally by offering tools such as quick reminders of essential skills, easy methods for monitoring and following up with contacts, and sharing encouragement and success stories from other coaches. Additionally, GRIT-e provides critical local and national resources and opportunities for involvement in community disaster response.



The primary goal of GRIT-e is to establish a network of GRIT Coaches across the U.S. and worldwide, ensuring that resilience-trained populations are prepared to support one another during community disasters. By offering a free, accessible program and developing tools to support and connect coaches, GRIT-e fosters resilience through social support during times of adversity.

As of the latest report, GRIT-e has over 120 coaches signed up. Additionally, there have been over 100 posts created on the platform. These metrics highlight the growing engagement and active participation within the GRIT-e community.

- **Active Communities:** GRIT-e Coaches are part of various active communities, including UCCS Faculty and Staff, Educators, Health Care Workers, Care Givers, School Shooting Victims/Survivors, Pilots, First Responders, Active-Duty Military Members, Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors, Veterans, Wildfire Victims/Survivors, and Fire Fighters.
- **Types of Traumatic Events Supported by Coaches:** GRIT-e Coaches support a wide range of traumatic events, including Burnout, Traumatic Stress, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Aerospace Crashes, Mass Violence, War, and Wildfires.

These communities and the types of traumatic events supported by our coaches demonstrate the diverse and comprehensive nature of the GRIT-e network, ensuring that a wide range of needs are met through this innovative platform.

As we embrace 2025, our commitment to innovation and community support remains stronger than ever. This year, we are launching several key initiatives designed to strengthen our technological capabilities, educational resources, and trauma-informed training programs. These efforts will not only streamline processes and improve communication but also empower our community with enhanced tools and knowledge to foster resilience and recovery. Below is an overview of the initiatives planned to further our mission in the coming year.

GRIT-e Updates for Educational Support

- Enhancing GRIT-e to support educational initiatives by adding features such as stress signs in youth and updating the steps of GRIT to be tailored for educational settings.
- Providing tools for resilience in education and support for the 3-Around-Me program, which involves creating a team of three adults in a school community who can work together to support each other and collaborate to support students and families.

GRIT-e Mobile Application

- A priority for the future of the GRIT program is to develop a mobile application that contains GRIT educational content and provides a medium for coaches and trainees to communicate while on-the-go.
- This app would allow timely distribution of content updates and would allow the Institute to study the use and impact of GRIT resources. These initiatives aim to enhance our technological infrastructure, improve educational support, and provide advanced training to better serve our community.



NEW FUNDING

GRANTS AND FUNDRAISING

Region 16 Opioid Council: Nicole Weis and the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience (the Institute) have partnered with [Status Code 4 Inc.](#) and [Insight Services, PLLC](#) to develop and provide a trauma informed training curriculum that will train medical providers and First Responders with skills to compassionately support community members in crisis and to address the potential opioid addictions within their own population. The curriculum will be a two-pronged education on how to interact with individuals with opioid addiction.

Pfizer: [Dr. Mary Hayden](#) joins a team of investigators for the project “[Measuring Lyme disease risk along two urbanization gradients in New York City and Boston](#).” This project investigates the expansion of Lyme Disease (LD) into urban areas in New York City and Boston. The purpose of this study is to (1) Identify populations at maximum risk for exposure to LD by determining the likelihood of human-tick encounters spatially within these two highly urbanized sites, (2) Quantify how the contribution of different exposure types (residential, recreational, and travel) to LD tick vectors varies across these urbanized gradients, and (3) Assess how people’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices vary across the gradients and are associated with exposure types.

Department of Defense: [Dr. Karen Markel](#) received a subaward from the University of Southern California to work on the [California Defense Ready Electronics and Microdevices Superhub \(CA DREAMS\)](#), led by USC Viterbi’s Information Sciences Institute. The award aims to accelerate the development of advanced semiconductor technologies.

U.S. Department of Education: [Dr. Charles Benight](#) and team will evaluate the statewide expansion of [Team STRONG](#), a program designed to build resilience in children and youth. The program, which combines the [Becoming Your Personal Best \(BYPB\)](#) initiative from the United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum and the [GRIT program](#) from the Institute, will now extend its reach across Colorado, helping students better cope with depression and anxiety.

Colorado Judicial Department: [Nicole Weis](#) and the Institute’s [Healing Division](#) submitted a successful bid to be a certified outpatient provider of mental healthcare for the Colorado Judicial Department. The agreement is valid through 2028 and will allow judicial department employees to receive care through the [Veterans Health and Trauma Clinic](#).

INSTITUTE GOALS

The Institute launched in March of 2020, just as pandemic lockdowns began and uncertainty loomed. This challenging backdrop highlighted the Institute’s core mission: building a more resilient world. From the start, we engaged in local pandemic response efforts with El Paso County and the City of Colorado Springs. By April, we launched GRIT training, establishing ourselves as a key resource for the region, state, and beyond. Since then, we’ve reached major milestones outlined in our initial strategic plan, developing focused goals across our Research, Healing, and Community Training and Empowerment Divisions - many of which we’ve surpassed. As we look ahead, we face a rapidly evolving landscape with new challenges and opportunities. While our strategic goals remain in flux due to the sweeping changes at the federal level, several key priorities are outlined here.

1. Develop a new Clinical Innovation Research Center for Veteran Trauma. This new research center will bring together a set of leading scholars focused on clinical innovation for the unique challenges faced by our Veterans.
2. Grow our clinical operations by 50% in the next 5-years to help meet the demand for high quality and innovative care for trauma survivors.
3. Collaborate with the City of Colorado Springs to train 25,000 total GRIT Coaches in our region to establish the first GRIT City in the nation.
4. Establish our WorkforceThrive program as a valued service for our business and non-profit community in the Pikes Peak region.
5. Conduct our first randomized clinical trial for the Milestones Resilience Care model.
6. Pursue philanthropic contributions to support essential clinical research initiatives, helping to compensate for reductions in available research funding.
7. Continue to build a robust Peer Support program for UCCS that can be a viable model for other campuses within the University of Colorado System.
8. Deepen collaboration with the Department of Psychiatry at the Anschutz Medical Campus focusing on alternative models of care (e.g., psychedelic therapies), student training opportunities, and biomedical research.
9. Grow our relationship with Strata Med at Garden of the Gods Resort and Club, where we are working together to build wellness and resilience across the region, the state, and beyond.
10. Continue to build research partnerships across the world to understand and boost resilience in individuals, families, and communities.



Research | Healing | Community Training & Empowerment

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