

StärkHER

HAPPINESS, EMPOWERMENT, RESILIENCE

Good feelings that last.



Impact and Project Report 2025/2026

Findings, experiences and impact of the StärkHER project

Karlsruhe, 1 October 2026



Project at a glance

Key facts and project partners

FUNDERS

Deutsches Hilfswerk / Deutsche Fernsehlotterie
GLS Treuhand e.V.
Steffen Lohrer Stiftung

LEAD ORGANIZATION

M.A.U.S. Charity gGmbH

PROJECT TITLE

StärkHER – Happiness, Empowerment and Resilience through HEAL, the Positive Neuroplasticity Training approach to supporting teenage girls' mental health

PROJECT PERIOD

1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026

DELIVERY

Five regular online courses and one additional age-adapted group

PARTICIPANTS

47 girls and young women took part in StärkHER

ATTENDANCE

35 participants attended at least four of six modules; 199 session attendances were recorded

EVALUATION

103 anonymous survey records across three time points

FUNDING AMOUNT

€19,500

CONTACT

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Project partners



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The StärkHER project

StärkHER is a free, accessible live online course that supports well-being, self-regulation and self-efficacy among girls and young women. M.A.U.S. Charity gGmbH is the lead organization. MindfulandMore gUG designed and delivered the course and managed the project.

6

weekly
sessions

90

minutes
per session

online

live and
location-
independent

free

for all
participants

At its core is the HEAL approach from Dr. Rick Hanson's Positive Neuroplasticity Training. Short breathing and body-awareness practices, mindfulness, ALI, body scans, reflection, self-soothing techniques and small-group conversations complement it.

The content is deliberately practical. Rather than adding another task to teenagers' already full lives, the exercises can be used before a test, after an argument, at bedtime or when things feel overwhelming. StärkHER does not replace psychotherapy. As a preventive program, it aims to help young people build psychological resources early and broaden the ways they respond to stress.

“At first I felt rather negative about it ... after the first session it was different.”

A few weeks later, a short mindfulness exercise had become part of this participant's routine. On the way to school, she used ALI – breathe, smile, pause – to calm herself. She reported stopping negative thoughts from growing and taking out stress on her family less often. These small shifts were at the heart of StärkHER: practical tools that help young people influence their own experience.

From pilot course to tested program

The first StärkHER pilot course took place in early 2025. Five girls and young women attended regularly. Even in this small group, early positive changes appeared in well-being, self-efficacy and positive emotions.

The pilot showed what young people need from a digital prevention program: short and clear exercises, relevance to daily life, active participation and room for genuine conversation. Small-group discussions in particular offered a safe space where trust and connection could grow.

47

girls and young women took part in StärkHER.

Building on the pilot, we developed the curriculum further and delivered five regular courses during the 2025/2026 funding period.

40

participants in the regular groups

7

in the additional younger group

35

attended at least 4 of 6 modules

199

recorded session attendances

+1

additional age-adapted group

During registration, many families also asked about places for girls under 13. In response, we offered an additional age-adapted group without extra delivery costs.

Content and course structure

StärkHER does more than teach facts about stress and mental health. Participants experience and try out the methods, then consider how to use them in their lives. Sessions combine short explanations with exercises, discussion, paired and group work, and reflection. Slides, worksheets and audio exercises remain available between sessions.

01

A fresh start for the mind

How does the brain work? Why do negative experiences often stay with us more strongly than positive ones?

02

Building inner resources

Learn HEAL: notice, enrich and consciously absorb a positive experience.

03

Foundations and self-regulation

Understand stress responses and regulate them through breathing, attention, body awareness and ALL.

04

Strength in difficult situations

Draw on inner resources when uncertainty, anxiety or stress arise.

05

Self-worth and practical tools

Explore self-compassion and self-worth, and practise simple ways to calm yourself.

06

Applying the tools in daily life

Build a personal toolkit for school, family life and the future.

Participants and delivery

The program was designed for girls and young women. It was free and accessible regardless of location. Live online sessions opened the course to participants beyond one region while allowing continuous personal support in small groups.

Additional group for ages 10 to 12

An additional, age-adapted course complemented the regular groups. Many of the younger girls were open and curious. They tried the exercises readily and began applying them to everyday situations.

The potential of early prevention

These experiences suggest that prevention programs may be valuable before or at the start of puberty. Younger groups need different language, shorter explanations and more playful ways of learning.

Outcomes and interpretation

Participants completed anonymous questionnaires before the course, immediately afterwards, and four to eight weeks later. We measured well-being with the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, positive and negative affect with PANAS, and general self-efficacy with the General Self-Efficacy Scale. The final export contained 103 response records.

From course start to course end

Measure	Change	Interpretation
Well-being	+9.6 WHO-5 points	$p=.041$, $n=27$
Positive affect	+0.42	$p=.004$, $n=27$
Self-efficacy	+0.41	$p<.001$, $n=26$
Negative affect	-0.31	not significant ($p=.079$)

Four to eight weeks after the course

+13.08

points in well-being

+0.50

positive affect

-0.27

negative affect

+0.44

self-efficacy

At follow-up, all four measures were more favorable than at baseline, with nominal p values below .05. Among the 20 respondents with both course-end and follow-up data, no statistically clear change appeared between those time points. This is consistent with mean scores being maintained over four to eight weeks, but does not prove lasting effects.

What do these findings mean?

The results are encouraging for a practice-based prevention project. StärkHER was not a randomized clinical study. There was no control group, follow-up responses were incomplete, and all outcomes were self-reported. The analyses were exploratory and the p values were not adjusted for multiple tests.

The people behind the numbers

The numbers describe changes at group level. Interviews show what these changes could mean in daily life. Not everyone experienced the same benefit. For that reason, the qualitative evaluation deliberately included a contrasting case.

//

"Before tests, I used ALI ... then I felt calmer and could focus better."

A 16-year-old said she felt calmer overall, although she saw less change in her goal of becoming more confident.

//

"I was afraid of the breakout rooms at first, but they were almost the best part."

Initially skeptical, this participant often used ALI on her way to school and said she was quicker to stop negative thoughts.

//

"When I have a lovely experience, I tell myself: this is a new flower."

A 19-year-old made the positive minute part of her evening routine while acknowledging other possible influences.

//

"Nothing is dramatically different in my life."

This voice matters too. The participant nevertheless described feeling calmer, using a body scan to fall asleep and seeing conflicts from new perspectives.

Sensitivity analysis: The anonymous survey export could not reliably link responses to age or cohort. In every possible removal of up to seven responses from the shared spring window, mean change remained favorable across the four measures.

HEAL and positive neuroplasticity

StärkHER builds on the idea that people can learn to give beneficial experiences more attention and inner space, helping these experiences become inner resources. The HEAL framework structures this process:



Have

Notice or create a beneficial or positive experience.



Enrich

Enrich it through time, attention, body sensations or personal meaning.



Absorb

Absorb the experience consciously and let it settle.



Link

Optionally connect a stable positive resource with a difficult experience.

An intervention study by Dr. Rick Hanson and colleagues supports the conceptual approach. It does not directly establish the effectiveness of StärkHER or its effects in adolescents.

Challenges and lessons learned

01

Less theory, more practice

We shortened longer explanations and connected them more closely with exercises and discussion.

02

Short exercises stick

Participants often adopted AI or mindful breathing because they could use them quickly.

03

Conversation is central

Small-group discussions built trust and meaningful contact online.

04

Age matters

Younger groups need different language, shorter sessions and playful approaches.

05

Supporting continued use

Booster sessions may refresh the methods and support their use in daily life.

06

Plan evaluation from the start

Cohort information, survey timing and pseudonymous links should be planned early.

IN FOCUS · Prevention before or at the start of puberty

The openness of the 10- to 12-year-olds suggests testing future courses designed specifically for this age group. A further question is whether an early preventive approach might also reach boys before stronger inhibitions develop during puberty about thinking and talking about their feelings, worries and insecurities. This is a hypothesis drawn from our project experience. It would need to be tested and evaluated in a separately designed future program.

What remains

The experiences do not disappear when the funding period ends. We now have a tested six-week curriculum, slides, exercises, worksheets and audio materials. We also have data and practical insights into which methods young people actually use.

I can do something.



I can calm myself before a test.



I can notice when something good happens.



I can stop a negative thought from growing.



I can learn to treat myself more kindly.

This may be the clearest way to describe self-efficacy: an experience of having some influence over how we respond to what happens, rather than an abstract psychological idea.

"She glows, inside and out. She is gentle and open, and she hugs everyone."

Participant's mother; translated from German

Outlook and possible expansion

StärkHER developed an accessible prevention program and tested it in several groups. The survey findings, participant accounts and practical experience offer a basis for considering how the program might be expanded.

Possible directions

- 1 One or two age-adapted courses for younger participants before or at the start of puberty
- 2 Careful piloting of the program with boys

Possible next steps

We hope to seek new funding for further development. The precise design remains open. Any future program would be developed separately and evaluated systematically from the outset.

Our experience points to questions worth testing. A new program would need to show whether the encouraging findings also appear in other groups.

Acknowledgments

A prevention program such as StärkHER takes more than a curriculum. It also takes people willing to trust an idea before its impact becomes visible.

We are especially grateful to

Deutsches Hilfswerk, Dachstiftung für individuelles Schenken (a trust foundation within GLS Treuhand e.V.), and Steffen Lohrer Stiftung. Their support made it possible to develop, deliver and evaluate StärkHER. It gave girls and young women free access to a course where they could recognize their own resources, manage stress more effectively and experience self-efficacy.

We also thank M.A.U.S. Charity gGmbH, the project's lead organization, and everyone else who helped put it into practice.

We thank the participants and their families. Their openness, feedback and personal experiences helped turn a pilot course into a tested prevention program that continues to learn.

47 participants. Five regular courses. One additional group. A tested curriculum. And many small moments in which young people discovered: I can make a difference.

Data sources and references

This report draws on the following project and evaluation materials.

1

Quantitative evaluation

Anonymous questionnaires at T1, T2 and T3 using WHO-5, PANAS and the General Self-Efficacy Scale; corrected analysis of paired results and a sensitivity analysis for possible cohort assignments.

2

Attendance and delivery

Attendance records, cohort summaries and project information for five regular courses and one additional group.

3

Qualitative evaluation

Anonymized final interviews and case studies with selected participants, together with feedback from participants and parents, including a voice message.

4

Curriculum and project records

Slides, worksheets, audio exercises, session plans and the StärkHER pilot course report of 15 May 2025.

5

Conceptual basis

Rick Hanson and colleagues' study of the Taking in the Good Course and the HEAL approach. It provides conceptual context, not direct evidence of effectiveness in adolescents.

6

Methodological context

These are exploratory findings from a practice-based program without a control group. They cannot establish clinical causality.