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Thriving Family Academy's (TFA) Mission: Empowering Kids To Thrive - One Family At A Time.

Our Vision: We build thriving communities through before and after school care and a summer camp.

How: Our team believes the essential ingredients of thriving include both a close-knit, caring community in addition to daily, self-regulation practices that enable families to flourish in the midst of the big & small challenges of life.

What: Our team at Thriving Family Academy (TFA) uses innovative yet proven, scientific approaches of [Posttraumatic Growth](#) (PTG) and [Trust-Based Relational Intervention](#) (TBRI) to empower the whole rainbow of families (kinship, foster and adoption) through a new model that prioritizes connection, community and growth. We partner with one family, one community and one public school at a time and are starting in our hometown of Burtonsville, MD.

Who We Are: TFA Founder and current Executive Director, Tom B. Smith, is an U.S. Air Force veteran who was honored to lead teams of special operation medics on 3 combat deployments, then joined a non-profit medical team which provided wrap-around care to Syrian refugees. He witnessed the amazing ability of some adults and kids from vastly different backgrounds to thrive after trauma in war zones and refugee camps. This is what began Tom's life-long mission to better understand the essential ingredients needed to cultivate a thriving life of service to others. This pursuit first led him to serving as a Veterans Policy Director in US Congress with a focus on empowering veterans with the training and tools to return to their communities and continue their service.

Why Do We Care?: Tom's focus expanded to helping youth thrive after trauma when he and his spouse, Amy, were lucky to become foster parents to three amazing kids in 2020. Despite the 8 month foster care certification process, 100s of hours of personal research into trauma-informed care, in addition to top-notch therapists and social workers for their kids, Tom & Amy found themselves overwhelmed and ill-trained to help each of their three kids work through their individual trauma. It was not until they found the practical, trauma-informed training, [TBRI](#), AND a supportive community that their entire family began to thrive. Like many parents, Tom and Amy work full-time and searched high and low for a nurturing and structured child-care & summer camp that approach their work with a strong culture that ALL kids can thrive if given enough long-term support.. Yet, in one of the richest counties in the country, this type of care that partners with the caregivers and kids and trains self-regulation practices, does not sadly exist in our community. This is at the heart of our mission at Thriving Family Academy to "Empowering Kids To Thrive - One Family At A Time".

Current Scope of the Challenge: Research clearly shows that we are in midst of a growing mental health crisis, especially among our disadvantaged youth with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reporting "...in the 10 years leading up to the pandemic, feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness—as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors—increased by about 40% among young people."¹ While the sharpest increase in suicides in youth in US were among Black youth ages 10 to 24 rose by over 36% in 3 years from 2018-2021 that included tragically losing 12 young people to suicide every day.²

¹ Pappas, S. (2023, July 1). More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide. *Monitor on Psychology*, 54(5), 54. [More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide. Psychologists and communities can help tackle the problem.](#)

² Abrams, Z. (2023, January 1). Kids' mental health is in crisis. *Monitor on Psychology*, 54(1), 63. [Kids' mental health is in crisis. Here's what psychologists are doing to help.](#)

Please reach out to our Founder: Tom@ThrivingFamilyAcademy.org or **Cell: 240-306-5599**

The Solution: Fortunately, the largest professional organization of pediatricians in the US, American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP), provides hope and the greatest area of improvement should include "...changing policies at the school or district level to provide more support for all students. For example, **school connectedness**—the degree to which **young people feel that adults and peers at school care about them and are invested in their success—is a key contributor to mental health**. Youth who felt connected...have fewer problems with substance use, mental health and suicidality as adults".³ As such, the **foundation of our programming at TFA is centered around cultivating lasting connections** among the mentors, caregivers and kids, in addition to partnering with one caregiver, one school and one community at a time during the school year and summer break.

How is Thriving Family Academy different?

- **Localized and Individualized:** We focus on one family at a time to establish long-term community over years with an individual mentor being partnered with the same 5 kids & their caregivers for their time at TFA (up to six years in K-5th).
- **Integrated with Parents & Caregivers:** Our goal is for parents or caregivers to THRIVE. Once a part of TFA, the family will have a team to work side-by-side with you to understand the daily challenges you and your kid are facing, then provide real-world best-parenting practices and techniques to help both parent and child not merely survive the week, but THRIVE. With this in mind, we offer (at ZERO additional cost) "1-on-1 Mentor & Caregiver Brainstorming Sessions" on a weekly basis, in addition to monthly "Caregiver Coffees" to provide both a trusted community of support & hands-on parent training.
- **World Class Staff:** We invest in our mentors so they can invest in parents, caregivers and kids!! Our aim is parent/care-giver and kid to have the same dedicated mentor the entire time at TFA- whether that's months or years! We provide top-notch and on-going training for our mentors on cutting-edge childcare, parenting and trauma-informed care. Finally, we are one of Maryland's most competitive before & after care organizations in both pay & benefits for our full-time childcare professionals.

School Year TFA Sample Schedule:

Monday Morning Session, 7:00am-9:15am:

- **7am:** Parent/Caregiver checks in their kid and has the opportunity to share any behavioral challenges that our TFA team can be helpful with during the week.
- **7am-8:30am:** Two options to choose: Outdoor play focused on a nature mini-hike OR Indoor play with team LEGO or Painting Time!
- **8:30-8:50am:** Small group time with their individual mentor and snack time. Mentors sees how their weekend went, anything the child is worried about this week, and 1 goal they'd like help with during the week.
- **8:50- 9:00am:** Group Learning "Introduction to Breathwork".
- **9:00-9:10am-** All kids and mentors together do "breathwork and calm down time".
- **9:10-9:15am-** Mentors walk their small teams to their individual class and brief discussion with their homeroom teacher..
- **9:30am-3:00pm:** Open time for parents & caregivers to schedule 1-on-1 virtual sessions with their kid's mentor to go over current challenges, social/emotional/academic goals, and regulation practices that are most helpful.

Monday Afternoon Session, 3:45pm-6:30pm:

- **3:45-4:15pm-** Small group time with their individual mentor to share a snack together, review their day, and homework help.
- **4:15-4:45pm:** Two options for kids to choose: Outdoor play focused on cooperative team-work via "Sharks and Minnows game" or indoor fun focused on confidence building via "Dance Party",
- **4:45-6:30pm:** Combination of self-regulation practice of the kid's/caregiver's preference (breathwork, movement, journaling) or indoor/ outdoor sensory activity. Then, mentor-led play to put these self-regulation training into practice with other kids.
- **6:30-8:30pm:** Open virtual or in-person time for parents & caregivers to schedule 1-on-1 sessions with their kid's mentor to go over current challenges, social/emotional/academic goals, and regulation practices that are most helpful.

³ Steiner, R., Sheremenko, G., & Lesesne, C. (2019, July). Adolescent Connectedness and Adult Health Outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 144(1). [Adolescent Connectedness and Adult Health Outcomes | Pediatrics](#).