



## Teenager Section

HL 04

# ENHANCING PERSONAL RESILIENCE AMONG THE YOUTH OF MACAU AMID THE PANDEMIC: THE ROLE OF CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS

Zenon A.S. Udani<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused a massive disruption on the lives of people around the world. This pandemic has tested our personal resilience – a virtue most needed during this time. The ubiquitous disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic offers life lessons and opportunities for the youth to develop their character through personal resilience. This paper focuses on enhancing personal resilience among the youth of Macau with the help of local civic associations. And local civic associations that work with and service the needs of young people have a crucial role and contribution to make.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Youth, Civic Association

---

<sup>1</sup> Udani, Zenon A.S.: HRD & OD consultant, Llife and Leadership coach, Inspirational speaker and author.. University of Macau (Previous). Email: zenudani@gmail.com

Hundreds of pharmaceutical research teams are in a tight race to produce a vaccine to effectively combat the disease. Governments in many countries are extremely frantic and on red alert to end the pandemic. Stressed out citizens, meanwhile, earnestly hope that this health nightmare would end soon, and a semblance of normalcy would be in sight.

The ideal personal response to any calamity or adversity is resilience. People suffer, grieve, and move on, turning the experience into fruitful life lessons. For some, personal resilience appears natural given the difficult life and circumstances that they have been through. For others, rebounding from a setback is much more arduous and longer. For all of us, nothing could have prepared us enough to face the various adversities caused by the present pandemic. But the choice to be resilient is ours to make.

Resilience comes from the Latin “resiliens”, meaning “to rebound or recoil”. Resilience springs from adversity (Ackerman, 2020; Ungar, 2008) enabling one to bounce back and overcome a difficulty (Strand and Peacock, 2003). Resilience has a cognitive dimension which allows a person, through experience and reflection, to discern that difficulties and setbacks are not dead ends. These life hurdles serve as learning moments and growth opportunities. Resilience also has a volitional dimension – that is when awareness of the value of difficulties lead someone to accept how things are, yet he is hopeful of how things would be given the right choices and decisions. Lastly, resilience has a behavioral dimension. Good lessons and promising decisions pertaining to resilience need to be externalized. In short, resilience in action is rewarding and praiseworthy.

Resilience is the natural and universal response to a pandemic (Chen and Bonanno, 2020). This is often more evident in countries and societies that have repeatedly endured both natural calamities and man-made misfortunes. The consequences of resilience depend on individual, familial and community factors, as well as the harshness of the experience with traumatic events (Chen and Bonanno, 2020). And while individual response is important to enduring a setback, support of any kind from civic associations will always be favorable.

Covid-19’s impact on Macau has been less severe compared to its regional neighbors. But the pandemic shut down the gaming industry for a few weeks, something that never

happened in the past. This paralyzed the flow of tourists into Macau, affecting all tourism and gaming-dependent operations and plunging corporate revenues. Many non-resident workers have lost their jobs. And some residents who kept their jobs had to absorb pay cuts.

This paper focuses on enhancing personal resilience among the youth of Macau with the help of local civic associations. The ubiquitous disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic offers life lessons and opportunities for the youth to develop their character through personal resilience. And local civic associations that work with and service the needs of young people have a crucial role and contribution to make.

### **1. The Toll of the Pandemic**

The toll caused by the pandemic has been far-reaching. And the mental anguish it brings affects almost everyone. “Indeed, fear from the virus is spreading even faster than the virus itself”, says Adhanom (2020: 129). Adhanom explains further:

*“In the current crisis, people can be fearful about becoming ill and dying, losing livelihoods, and loved ones, and being socially excluded and separated from families and caregivers. People who test positive for COVID-19 have to cope with anxiety about their condition, physical discomfort, separation from loved ones, isolation, and possibly stigma. Many people in the world are suffering from loss of livelihoods and opportunities. Those who have loved ones affected by COVID-19 are facing worry and separation. Some people turn to alcohol, drugs or potentially addictive behaviours such as gaming and gambling. Domestic violence has increased. Finally, people experiencing the death of a family member due to COVID-19 may not have the opportunity to be physically present in their last moments, or to hold funerals according to their cultural tradition, which may disrupt the grieving process.” (Adhanom, 2020, 129)*

The images vividly described above are ubiquitous. And they disturb everyone in various degrees. Being resilient is a choice every individual can make, and any support group or civic association can help promote it. The decision to be resilient allows people to focus on lasting

life goals rather than remain passive victims of the pandemic. For this matter, any support from civic associations is invaluable.

## 2. Helping the Youth Grow in Resilience

The Education and Youth Affairs Bureau of the Macau has encouraged the youth to engage more actively in volunteer work (Macau Daily Times, 2020). The bureau sees this as a crucial element in a student's personal development. It suggested that schools take note of student's volunteer hours and include this in their performance records. Needless to say, this initiative contributes to increasing resilience among the youth. Volunteer work trains them to pursue goals beyond their personal needs. Serving others expands their generosity and social concern. And working with others refines the rough edges of their personality and builds their good character. Moreover, volunteer work supports the goal of the Macau government to enhance the moral development of the youth.

Davenport and Skandera (2020: 59) state that, "Civic associations play a distinctive and vital role in a democratic society, developing core virtues and values that enable individuals to contribute to public life and maintain the political institutions of a free society." Civic associations in Macau have a significant role in the personal and professional development of the youth. Whether directly or indirectly targeted by their mission, helping the youth grow in resilience could be their significant contribution to their welfare during these pandemic times.

## 3. A Resilience Framework for Civic Associations

As a civic association's framework in growing personal resilience among the youth of Macau, we propose the **GROWTH-GRIT-GRATITUDE mindset** (or 3G mindset, in short), a combination of independent but related frameworks for personal development. This framework can guide and steer the programs, projects, and initiatives of civic associations focusing on the youth.

Carol Dweck developed the **Growth mindset** which direct persons to see opportunities for development and growth in setbacks and difficult circumstances. Contrary to the Fixed mindset, the growth outlook spurs the individual to be more resilient, reflective, and decisive on moving on, learning, and become better at life, work, and relationships. Dweck (2019: 3) asserts that, “Those with a growth mindset know they have to work hard, and they enjoy it. They understand that effort is what ignites their ability and causes it to grow over time.” Informing the Macau youth with a growth mindset is constructive. It heightens their sense of responsibility and spirit of service.

Angela Duckworth researched and worked on the world of **Grit**. She defines it as “passion and perseverance towards long-term goals”. Growth, performance, and achievement are not exclusive domains of the gifted and talented. Anyone who invests effort and passion in an initiative and perseveres at it will achieve higher goals. Duckworth (2016: 346) suggests how grit can be developed: “On your own, you can grow your grit ‘from the inside out’: You can cultivate your interests. You can develop a habit of daily challenge-exceeding-skill practice. You can connect your work to a purpose beyond yourself. And you can learn to hope when all seems lost. You can also grow your grit ‘from the outside in.’ Parents, coaches, teachers, bosses, mentors, friends—developing your personal grit depends critically on other people.”

Gratitude guru, Robert Emmons, demonstrates from his extensive research how **Gratitude** assures a person’s happiness, fortifying the roots of personal resilience. Emmons (2010) enumerates below the benefits of nurturing the attitude of gratitude:

**Physical:** *stronger immune systems; less bothered by aches and pains; exercise more and take better care of their health; sleep longer and feel more refreshed upon waking*

**Psychological:** *higher levels of positive emotions; more alert, alive, and awake; more joy and pleasure; more optimism and happiness*

**Social:** *more helpful, generous, and compassionate; more forgiving; more outgoing; feel less lonely and isolated*

Applying this **Growth-Grit-Gratitude framework**, civic associations can instill in their programs a growth perspective – embedding challenges in volunteer initiatives that develop

the character of the youth. They can nurture healthy work and life values and virtues that will drive people to persistently pursue developmental goals. And they can foster beneficial, lifelong attitudes of gratitude and appreciation for the blessings they now possess and will receive.

#### 4. Training and Development for Building Personal Resilience

For a start, civic associations in Macau may offer workshops or webinars to instill awareness and strengthen the personal resilience of the youth. The training design and implementation may be done through internal help or through external consultants. Some core modules are described in the table below:

PPROPOSED TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT MODULES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE AMONG MACAU YOUTH				
Modules	Title	Objectives	Methodology	Duration (hours)
1	<b>Crafting a Personal Vision Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Review one's life story</li> <li>✓ Reaffirm personal vision and mission as meaningful anchors</li> <li>✓ Design personal vision board in pursuit of big goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Webinar</li> <li>▪ Structured presentation</li> <li>▪ Individual exercises</li> <li>▪ Shared discussion</li> </ul>	2.5

2	<b>Boosting Personal Resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Examine one's response to the pandemic</li> <li>✓ Adopt the Growth-Grit-Gratitude Mindset</li> <li>✓ Craft a personal resilience plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Webinar</li> <li>▪ Structured presentation</li> <li>▪ Individual exercises</li> <li>▪ Shared discussion</li> </ul>	2.5
3	<b>Owning a Self-Care Plan Amid the Pandemic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Awareness of personal well-being in multiple dimensions of life</li> <li>✓ List Stop-Start-continue self-care habits</li> <li>✓ Adopt a practical self-care plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Webinar</li> <li>▪ Structured presentation</li> <li>▪ Individual exercises</li> <li>▪ Shared discussion</li> </ul>	2.5
4	<b>Gratitude Matters: An Alternative Resource for Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Explore the role of gratitude in volunteer work</li> <li>✓ Enhance relationships and performance through the attitude of gratitude</li> <li>✓ Adopting daily habits for grateful living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Webinar</li> <li>▪ Structured presentation</li> <li>▪ Individual exercise</li> <li>▪ Shared discussion</li> </ul>	2.5

**Crafting a Personal Vision Board.** A vision board is a visual presentation of what one wants *to be*, *to have*, and *to do*. A person may aspire to be more grateful, to have a more meaningful job, or to do volunteer work at a home for the elderly. These aspirations, equated to desired goals, are matched with visual reminders such as pictures, cutouts, objects, or

affirmation words. They are posted on board in the form of collage, serving as effective reminders of one's aspirations. This personal vision board becomes a visual reminder which one can look at throughout the day.

The goals can naturally focus on matters of personal resilience, serving as building blocks in acquiring the habit and virtue.

Civic associations can conduct this webinar every year. And the webinar or workshop design can be adjusted to suit the needs of the youth participants.

**Boosting Personal Resilience.** Building resilience can be done through life experiences and initiated through learning sessions like webinars or workshops. Resilience enables a person to rebound from an untoward experience. Helping the youth to grow in resilience means empowering them to accept and deal with their present realities; discover and reaffirm their deeper purpose and meaning; and move on to a better life. The Growth-Grit-Gratitude resilience framework can orient civic associations in their youth-related programs.

In addition, Southwick and Charney (2012: 11) identified 10 resilience factors that are crucial in acquiring the habit and virtue, namely:

- realistic optimism
- facing fear
- moral compass
- religion and spirituality
- social support
- resilient role models



- physical fitness
- brain fitness
- cognitive and emotional flexibility
- meaning and purpose

Daily focus, effort, and persistence in imbibing these traits will help one in acquiring personal resilience. In this regard, civic associations can assume the role of proactive learning partners of the youth in pursuit of personal development.

**Owning a Self-Care Plan.** The volunteer work opportunities provided by Macau civic associations are usually other-directed or other-centered. For volunteers to serve their beneficiaries better, proper and suitable self-care must be in place.

Self-care is an active and willful preservation and enhancement of our well-being. It covers a spectrum of actions aimed at maintaining and boosting our health, shielding us from disease and dealing with illness.

A webinar on crafting a self-care plan is essential for developing resilience among the youth of Macau. Civic associations that promote this goal help young persons assume responsibility for their well-being. And many benefits accrue from this endeavor.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2009) lists the following benefits of self-care:

- *Reduces occupational hazards such as burnout and compassion fatigue*
- *Helps build resilience*
- *Models healthy behavior for clients*
- *Promotes quality of caring*

- *Increases the capacity for empathy*
- *Fortifies relationships with clients and others*
- *Enhances self-esteem and confidence*
- *Contributes to realistic goal setting*

A self-care plan may focus and cover four core dimensions of life – the *spiritual, physical, emotional, and material*. The pointers below offer practical suggestions which can be adopted as daily personal resolutions for effective self-care.

### **Spiritual Self-Care**

*Nourishing our soul with truth, beauty, and goodness \* Conversation with God \**  
*Seeking and living one's deeper purpose \* Peace of mind and a cheerful heart*

- Self-awareness, self-reflection on one's deeper purpose
- Live in God's presence, entrust the day ahead to God
- Prayer and meditation
- Draw inspirations from saints and heroes through the classics
- Seek a spiritual coach & support group
- Renew yourself with a personal retreat, or a community retreat
- Enjoy nature - get out - reflecting on your blessings
- Reach out to someone, help without expecting any return
- Read good inspirational books and watch motivational videos
- Self-awareness, self-reflection on one's deeper purpose
- Live in God's presence, entrust the day ahead to God
- Prayer and meditation

- Draw inspirations from saints and heroes through the classics
- Seek a spiritual coach & support group
- Renew yourself with a personal retreat, or a community retreat
- Enjoy nature - get out - reflecting on your blessings
- Reach out to someone, help without expecting any return
- Read good inspirational books and watch motivational videos

### **Physical Self-Care**

*Honoring our body with proper care \* Living a healthy and balanced life \**  
*Discovering your physical potential \* Being a steward to material resources*

- Set a daily plan for your life; choose a useful routine
- Get sufficient rest and sleep
- Commit to a healthy diet; take food of good nutritional value
- Get a makeover at a salon; use essential oils for your skin
- Engage in regular and age-appropriate physical exercise
- Dance to the beat of music you enjoy
- Get some sun daily; practice deep breathing
- Wear the outfit that gives you confidence
- Schedule your annual medical check up
- Put order in your wardrobe and cabinets
- Get an aromatherapy diffuser for your room
- Visit a wellness center
- Take a walk; be active

- Stretch from your desk
- Drink enough water daily
- Get a misting and disinfection service for the house
- Consider doing a vertical or indoor garden
- Consider some form of art therapy
- Declutter your work area; give your room a makeover

### **Emotional Self-Care**

*Caring for your emotions and overall well-being \* Creating healthy psychological boundaries \* Mindful of the present moment \* Custody of the heart and the senses*

- Nurture emotional intelligence
- Capture happy family moments in video
- Catch yourself when trapped in useless worries
- Use your self-care vision board
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Take regular breaks for social media
- Exercise the 4-7-8 breathing technique (Inhale for 4 seconds; hold for 7 seconds; exhale for 8 seconds)
- Find a good coach and mentor
- Stay in touch with friends
- Join a wholesome support group
- Read some motivational article
- Try laughter yoga exercises

- Smile at yourself in the mirror
- Write gratitude notes or text messages
- Watch an inspiring short video
- Recall a happy memory with family and friends
- Listen to feel good music
- Use aromatic essential oils to uplift, energize or relax your mood
- Drink water or calming tea
- Find a corner for some minutes of quiet time

### **Mental Self-Care**

*Nurturing & managing your mental state \* Keeping the mind healthy and happy \**

*Doing some “mental floss” \* Focusing your mind on what truly matters*

- Start everyday with positive affirmations (“It’s great to be alive!”)
- Practice positive self-talk; foster an optimistic voice in your head
- List down three things you are most grateful – morning & night
- Identify five positive things you see around
- Enjoy good humor
- Limit your “worry time”
- Be aware of negative language
- Think about helping others in meaningful ways
- Practice forgiveness; let someone know you are sorry
- Avoid toxic relationships

- Explore a new hobby and be creative
- Reflect on what makes you special
- Call a friend
- Look for a suitable mentor or coach
- Laugh more
- Do not take yourself seriously
- Recall good childhood memories
- Complain less today
- Write your future self an encouraging letter dated Dec. 31, 2020
- Practice mental hygiene: vet the quality of social media you use
- Evaluate each day and resolve to live a better tomorrow

**Gratitude Matters.** A webinar on workshop on the attitude of gratitude will also be useful for the youth of Macau. Counting one's blessings and doing one's turn to share blessings with others is highly beneficial to volunteer activities. It is a disposition that will help the youth offer their best abilities and find great satisfaction from the service they do.

Ordinary life abounds with reasons for gratefulness. By being mindful and focused on what matters, we open our mind and heart to moments of gratitude and utmost care for what is valuable in life. With a gaze toward others and not just furtive glances, we learn to appreciate the goodness people have and feel blessed as well. Gratitude precludes self-centeredness and indifference towards others. It gives credence to the possibility of building bridges and breaking walls among a diverse group of individuals.

We often forget to be grateful. It is good and healthy to make a conscious effort to be always thankful. It is like learning how to breathe properly to improve our well-being. We wish we could have adopted the attitude and virtue of gratitude much more in the past. We could have reaped more benefits and gained more ground in our personal development.

Nonetheless, every moment is always a good time to cultivate gratefulness. This will make us happier, give us peace of mind, make us more sensitive to others, and conscious of the gifts of life, faith, family, and friends.

We are born with a huge potential for gratefulness. Our human nature is endowed with a free will that is inclined toward the good. And the manner we were raised and nurtured allowed us to grow the habit and attitude of gratitude virtuously. We were taught by our parents and elders to be grateful, to say “Thank you” to those who do us favors. We flourished in our thankfulness as we experienced and learned the beauty of kindness, both as recipients and benefactors. Every goodness that we have experienced gives us firmer reasons for being grateful. Emmons (2007: 54) states that “We are receptive beings, dependent on the help of others, on their gifts and their kindness. As such, we are called to gratitude.” He explains further that “It is gratitude that enables us to receive and it is gratitude that motivates us to repay by returning the goodness that we have been given. In short, it is gratitude that enables us to be fully human” (2007: 55).

## **5. Lasting Support and Coaching Assistance from Civic Associations**

Macau civic associations can further sustain their aid in boosting resilience among the youth of Macau by forming peer support groups (PSGs) within their programs. These PSGs serve as close-knit groups for mutual care and support and sharing encouraging experiences in facing challenges pertaining to resilience and other life issues. Civic associations can earmark resources to propel this initiative.

Moreover, coaching and mentoring assistance can be provided to the youth by qualified and dependable officers of civic associations. This platform will also hasten the nurturing of future leaders for the civic associations.

Helping the youth of Macau grow in personal resilience will pan out with the unflinching support of civic associations and the government. This effort ultimately benefits families in Macau as well.

## REFERENCES

- Ackerman, C. (2020.) How to Measure Resilience With These 8 Resilience Scales, PositivePsychology.com (accessed on August 19).
- Adhanom Ghebreyesus, T. (2020). Addressing mental health needs: An integral part of COVID-19 response. *World Psychiatry*, 19, 129 –130. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/wps.20768>
- APA (2009). An Action Plan for Self-Care, [https://www.apaservices.org/practice/good-practice/Spring09-SelfCare.pdf?\\_ga=2.50572329.1403771615.1601889030-1776456979.1601889029](https://www.apaservices.org/practice/good-practice/Spring09-SelfCare.pdf?_ga=2.50572329.1403771615.1601889030-1776456979.1601889029) (accessed on October 5, 2020).
- Cafer, A. (2020). A Framework to Build Resilience, <https://www.communitypsychology.com/resilience-framework/> (Accessed on August 20).
- Chen, S., & Bonanno, G. A. (2020). Psychological adjustment during the global outbreak of COVID-19: A resilience perspective. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12(S1), S51-S54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000685>
- Davenport, D. & Skandera, H. (2020). Civic Associations. [https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/0817939628\\_59.pdf](https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/0817939628_59.pdf) (accessed on October 6, 2020)
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner.
- Dweck, C. (2019). Developing Talent through a Growth Mindset. <https://iiabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/GrowthMindset.pdf> (accessed on October 7, 2020).
- Emmons, R. (2010). Why gratitude is good. Greater Good Science Center. [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_gratitude\\_is\\_good](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good)
- Macau Daily Times (2020). “Education authority encourages students to do volunteer work,” accessed September 8: <https://macaudailytimes.com.mo/briefs-education-authority-encourages-students-to-do-volunteer-work.html>



Emmons, R. (2007). Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Southwick, S. and Charney, D. (2012) Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strand, J. and Peacock, R. (2003) Tribal College: Journal of American Indian Higher Education; Mancos Vol. 14, Iss. 4 : 28.

Ungar, M. (2008). “Resilience Across Cultures”, British Journal of Social Work 38, 218–235  
doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl343