

Positive Outlook

An Applied Research Brief

The Pathways to Encore Purpose Project is a collaboration between the Stanford Graduate School of Education's Center on Adolescence and Encore.org to deepen understanding of purpose in the encore years.

The research says...

People who are purposeful have a positive outlook on life. The survey results show that higher levels of life satisfaction are associated with purpose.

People who are purposeful beyond the self display greater:

Life satisfaction
Personal growth
Generativity
Wisdom
Gratitude
Empathy

“The best way to have real joy in life is to give, to help others, whether you give yourself, or give financially.

Try to do what you can to help each other.”

Interview Respondent:
a Native American social entrepreneur

In the interviews, the great majority (94 percent) of those interviewed who were unambiguously purposeful share a trait we call “positivity,” which refers to joy, hopefulness, optimism and other related emotions. Though many people in this group were dealing with serious life problems, such as poverty, poor health, family difficulties and bereavement — they emphasized the joy and satisfaction they experience in their lives, especially in their beyond-the-self engagements.

You can use these findings to:

- Encourage volunteer recruiters to reach out to older adults in a wide range of life circumstances, including people in poverty, people who may be living with chronic illness, or people who have recently lost a friend or a spouse.
- Frame opportunities to give time or money as sources of joy and satisfaction.
- Utilize images in recruiting, branding, or fundraising materials that show positive emotions.
- Ask enthusiastic volunteers to tell others how getting involved with your cause or organization has enhanced their lives.

The Pathways to Encore Purpose (PEP) project is a collaboration between the Stanford Graduate School of Education's Center on Adolescence and Encore.org. The Stanford University research team conducted a nationally representative survey of nearly 1,200 adults, ages 50-90, followed by 102 in-depth interviews to determine what role "purpose" plays in their lives. The study's authors define **purpose as a sustained commitment to goals that are meaningful to the self** and that also **contribute in some way to the common good**, to something larger than or beyond the self.

The research examined older adults' life goals, prosocial values and behaviors, perspectives on the progression to later life, and prevalence of purpose in their post-midlife, or encore, years. This series of applied research briefs highlights each of the the six major findings from the Stanford University study, with a focus on what they might mean for practitioners. All six findings can be found at encore.org/research/purpose.