



# Generation YES: Cultivating Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Skills in Young Women to Enhance STEM Career Success

## Background

The advancement of women to leadership roles is crucial for diversifying STEM. A lack of confidence is a major barrier for women to pursue leadership. In highly evaluative settings like college, ability is often valued over effort, but stereotypes that women lack ability in STEM combined with women’s own tendency to associate failure with lack of ability create a double challenge for women pursuing degrees in STEM. To build self-efficacy and self-confidence, women must be given opportunities to practice leadership. Four areas of emotional intelligent leadership (EIL) are most significant for women: initiative, facilitating change, developing relationships, and managing conflict.

“I hope to grow my confidence in the engineering field...I know I am smart enough to do it...but the industry intimidates me.”  
Intern, Spring 2024

## Integration of EIL Components

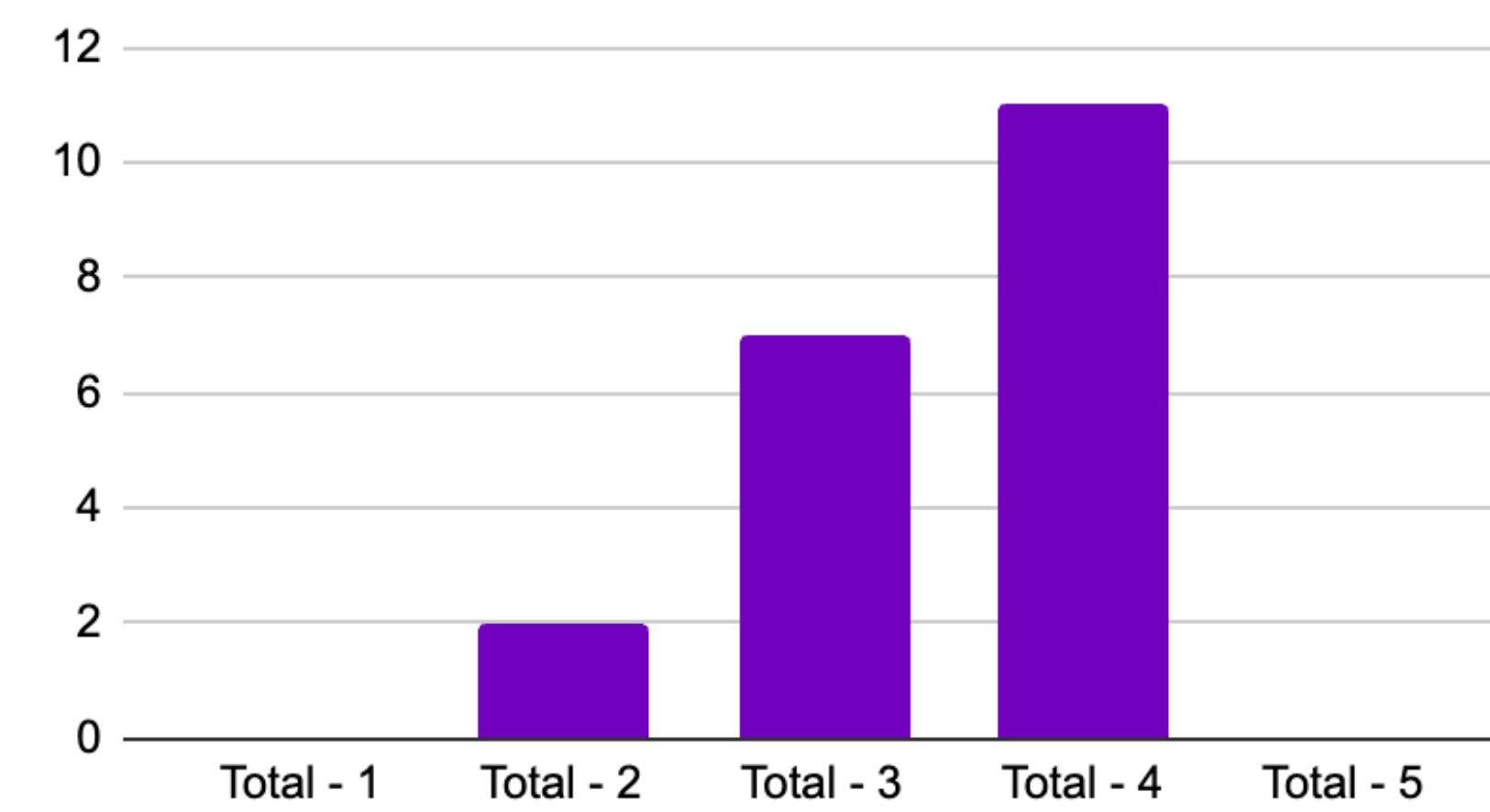
Generation YES is our eight-week remote internship program for college women to develop skills and strength for leadership in STEM. It addresses:

- 1) Initiative:** “Taking action”
  - 65 interns design proposals of action items
  - 6 Fellows direct implementation after program
- 2) Facilitating change:** “Working toward new directions”
  - 14 projects with global organizations
  - Issues of safe pregnancy education, high school mentorship, workplace stereotypes, and more
- 3) Developing relationships:** “Building a network of trusting relationships”
  - 15 Advisors hosting weekly check-ins
  - 5 guest experts reviewing proposals
- 4) Managing conflict:** “Identifying and resolving conflict”
  - Pitch solution to partner and discuss concerns
  - 8-week leadership course teaches negotiation, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution

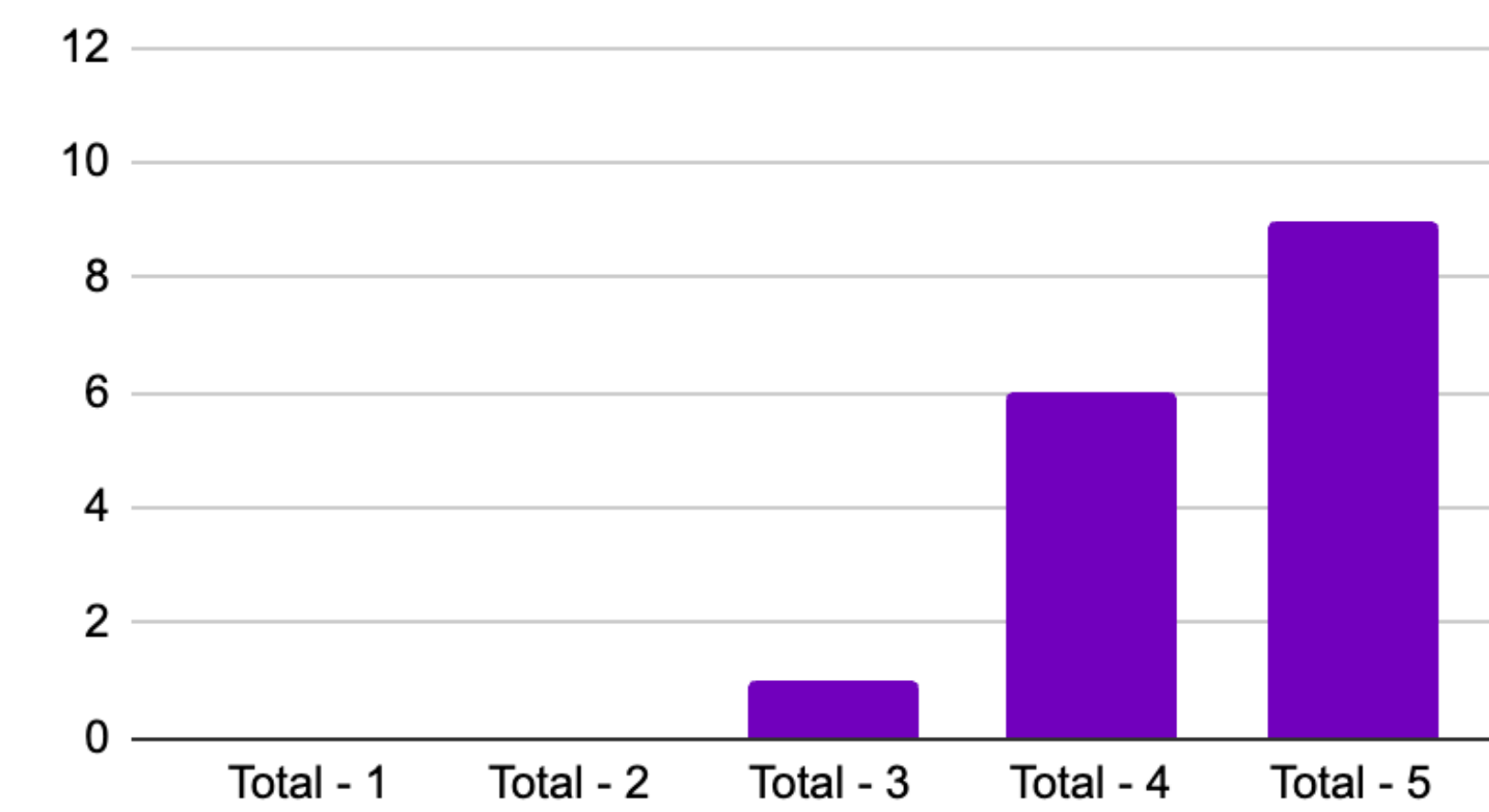
All numbers refer to impact as of September 2024.

Aynsley Szczesniak  
Founder and CEO, Speak Out Sisterhood

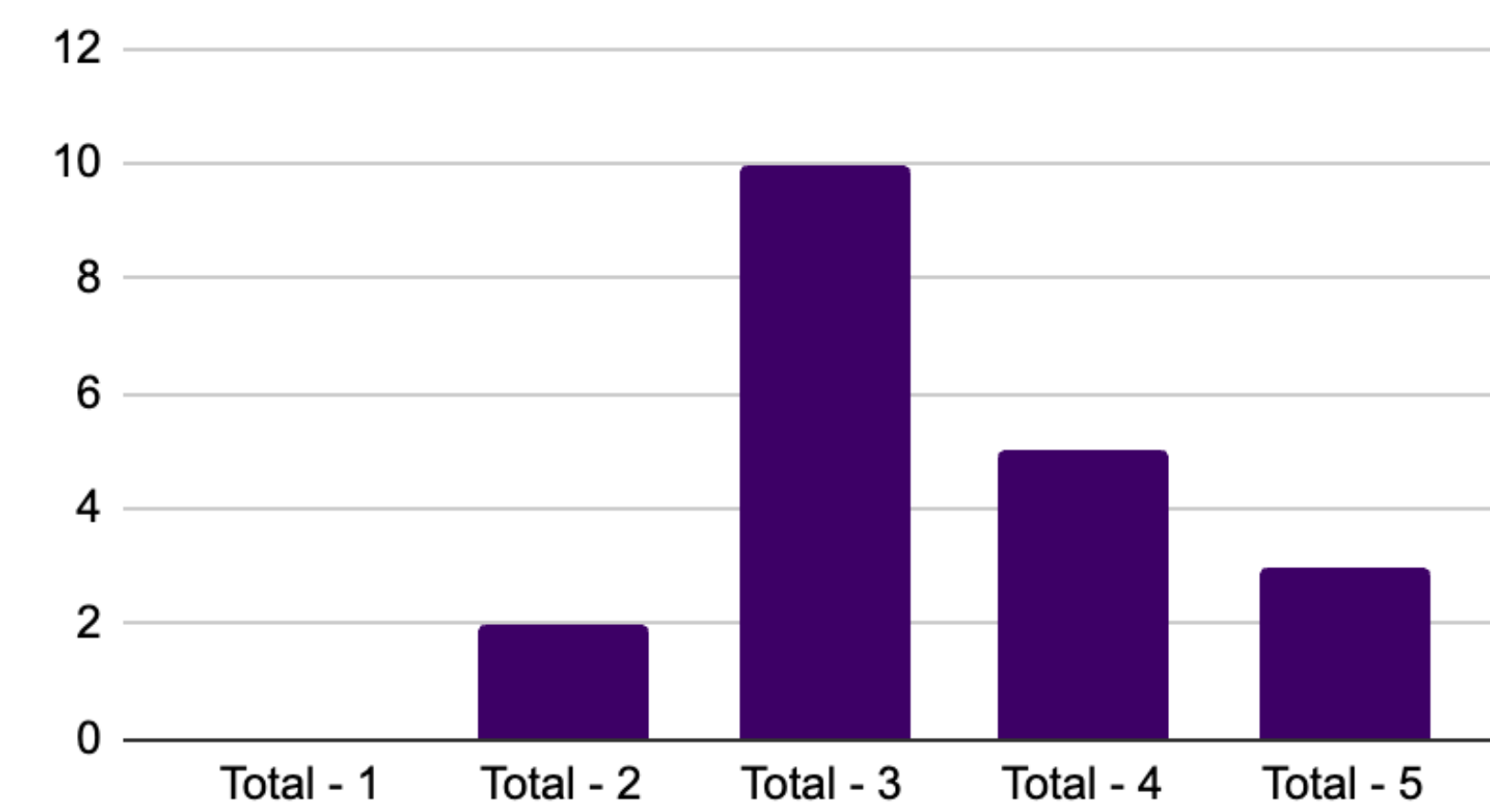
Pre-Survey: "I am aware of my leadership style"



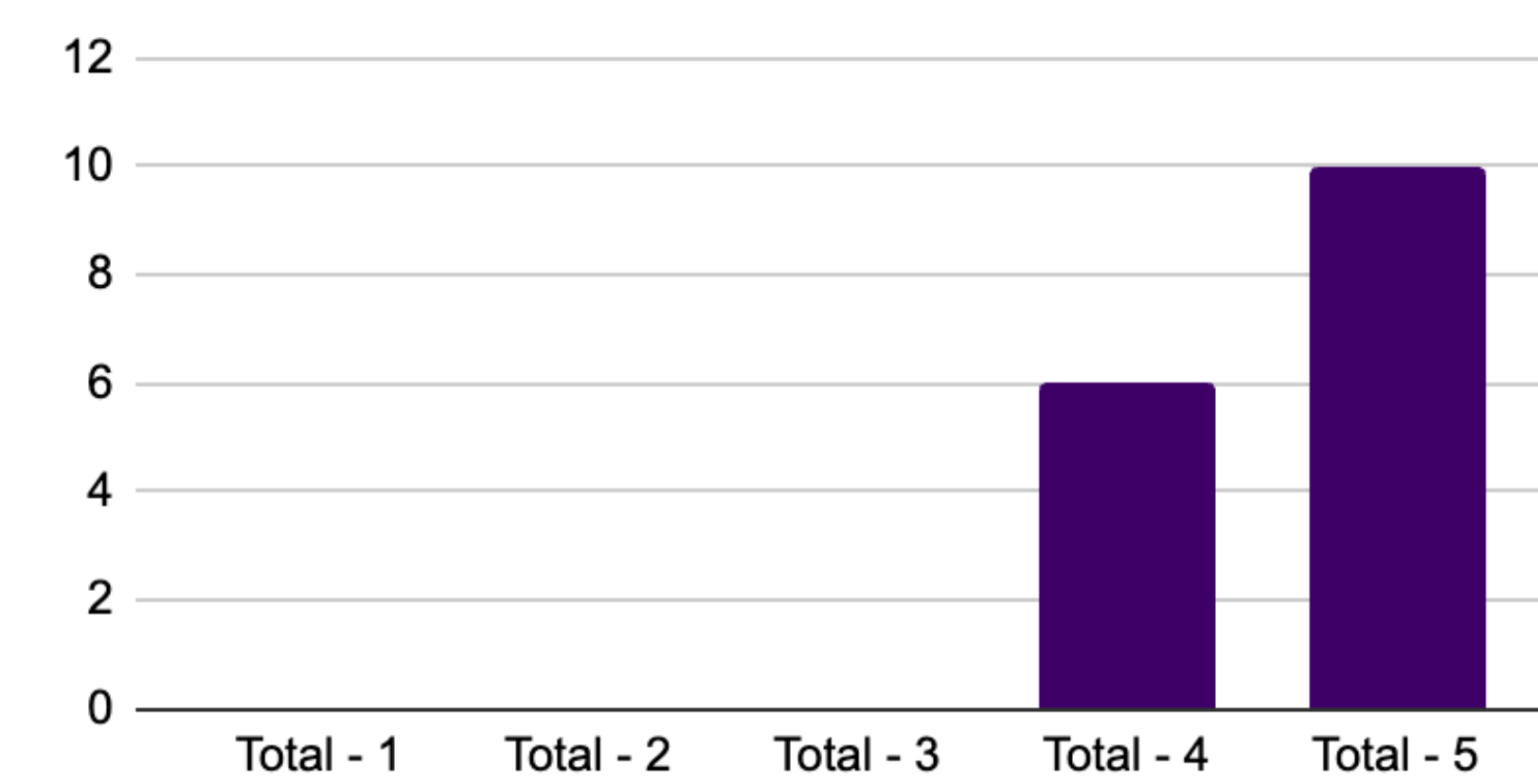
Mid-Survey: "I am aware of my leadership style"



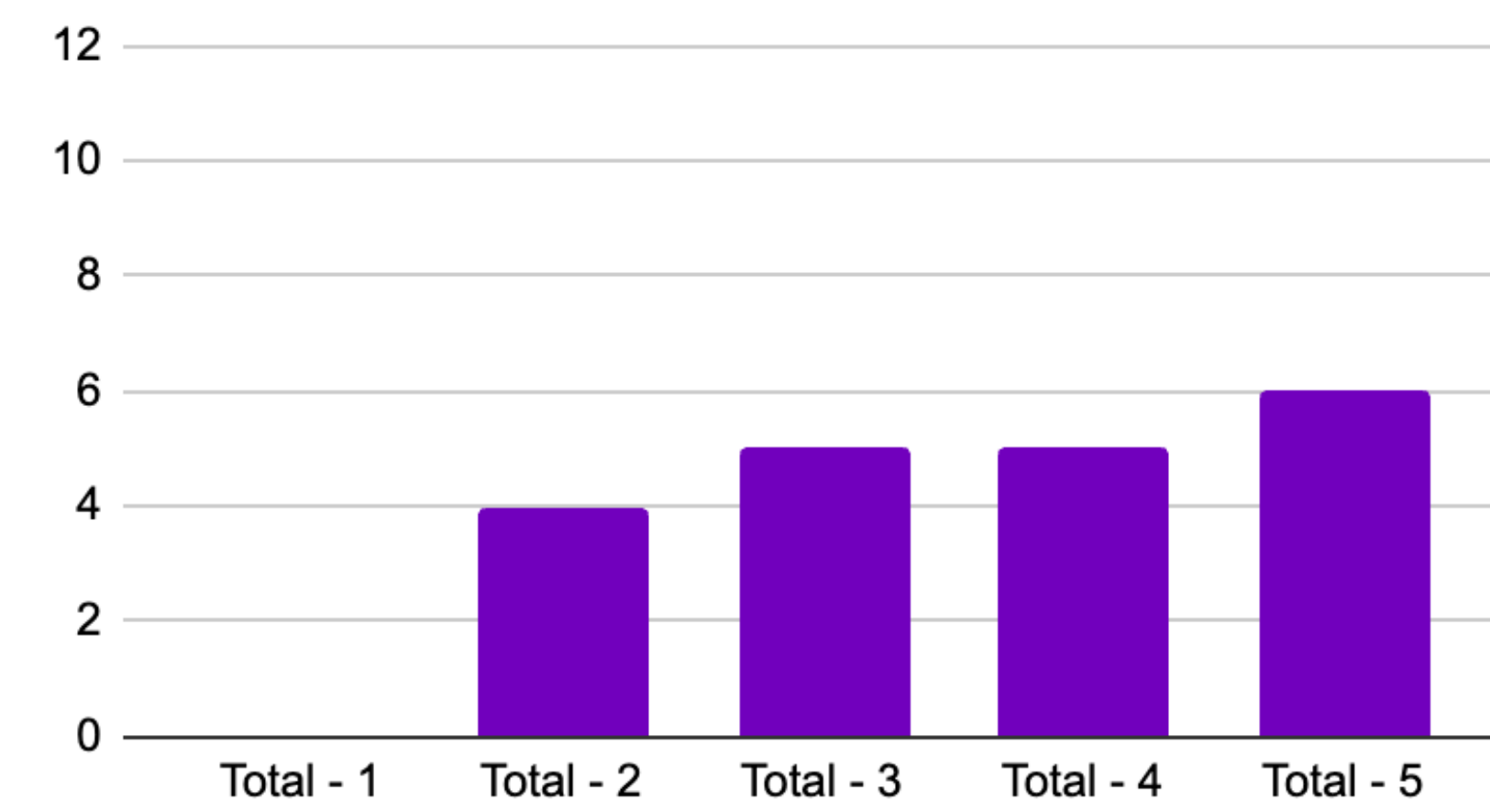
Pre-Survey: "I prioritize my mental and physical health"



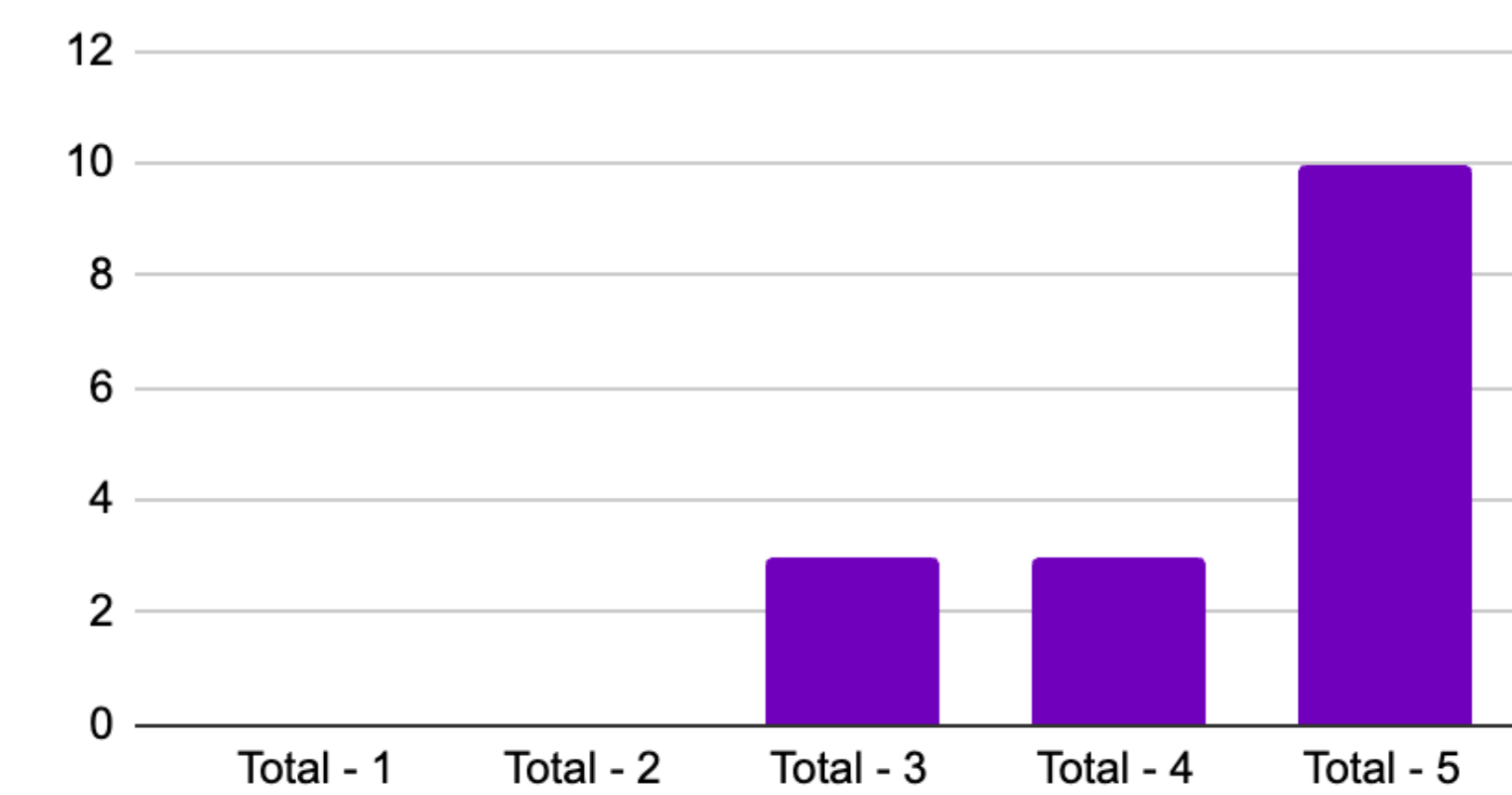
Mid-Survey: "I prioritize my mental and physical health"



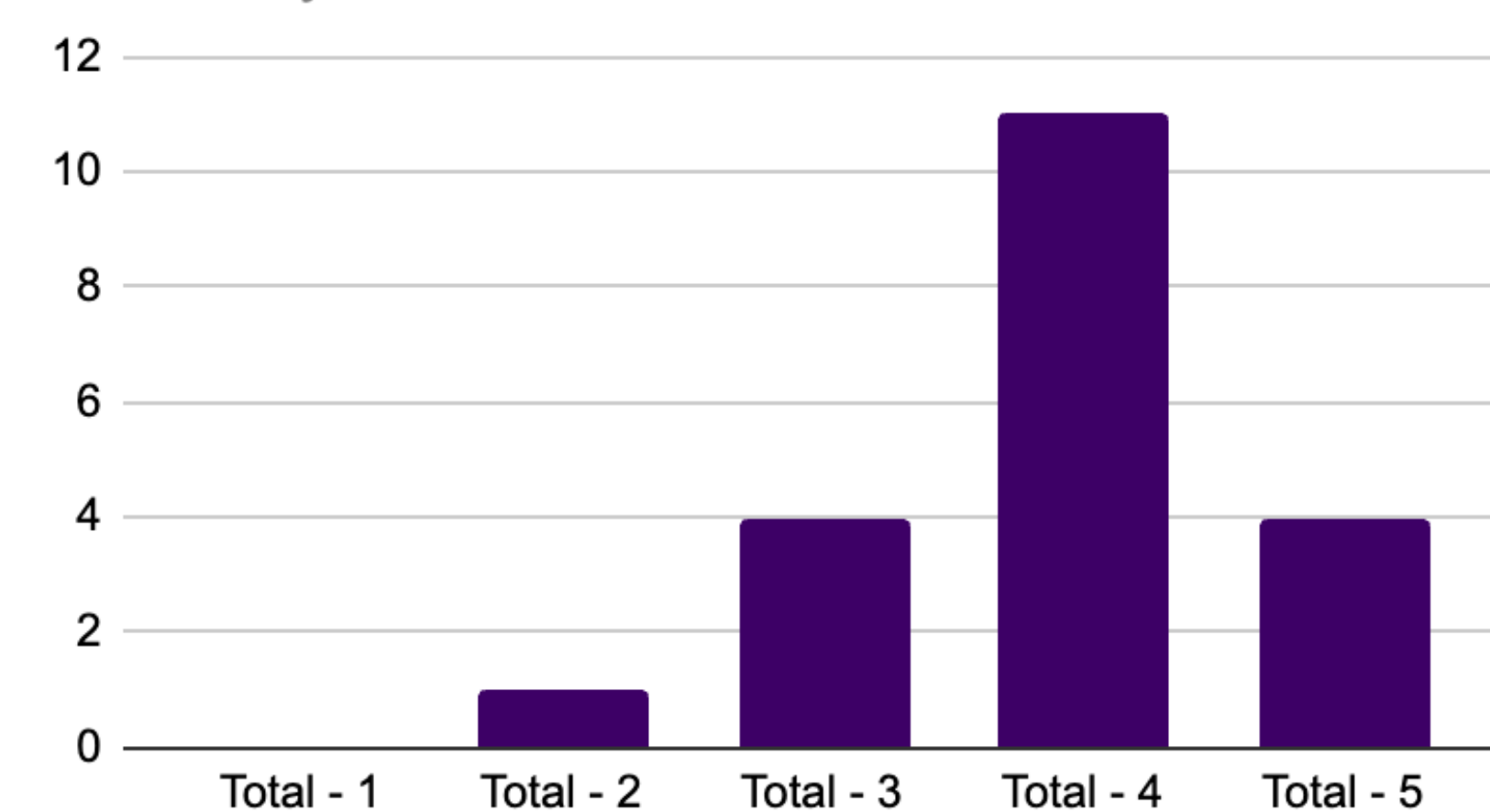
Pre-Survey: "I am not afraid to ask for help"



Mid-Survey: "I am not afraid to ask for help"



Pre-Survey: "I know what confidence feels like"



Mid-Survey: "I know what confidence feels like"

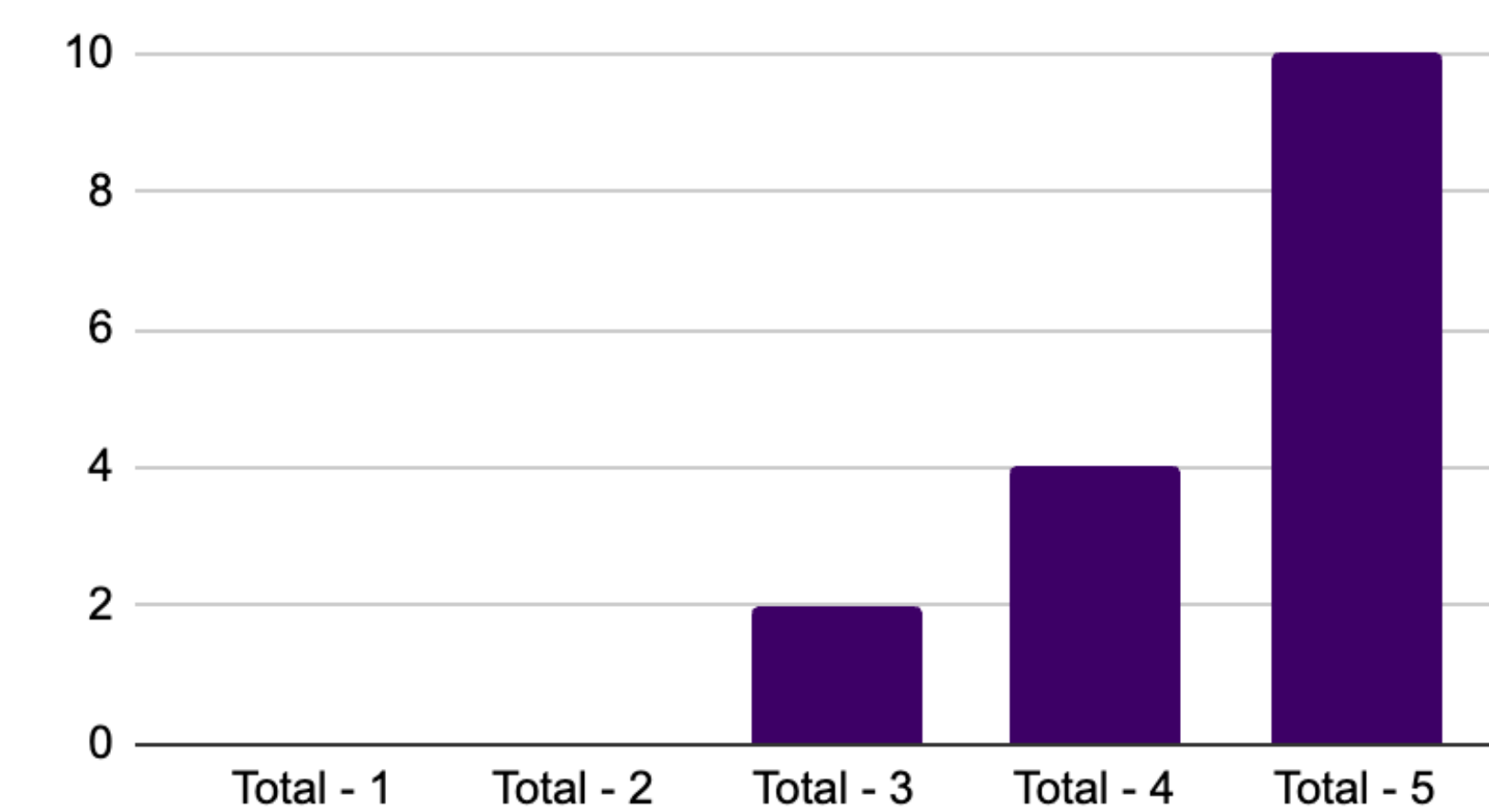


Fig 1. In our Fall 2024 cohort, we had 20 interns and collected data in a Pre-Survey, Mid-Survey, and Post-Survey. Our Post-Survey data was invalid, so we focus here on the data from our Mid-Survey, from Week 5. Interns were asked to rank their responses to each question on a scale from 1 (least agreement) to 5 (most agreement). These are four of the 12 total questions.

After just four weeks, our interns demonstrate significant improvements in four major components of leadership – self-awareness, prioritizing mental and physical health, seeking guidance, and understanding what sets apart moments of confidence.

## Significance and Application

Our program data reinforces the conversation about women’s career success. A 2023 study shows a strong correlation between grit and two factors: subjective career success and person-job fit, both linked to greater career development behavior in employees. Additional research finds that women who perceive a good “fit” between their skills and job rewards are more likely to persevere toward their career goals.

This highlights our program’s value. Young women who prioritize mental health and recognize when they need help or lack confidence can better assess if a work environment aligns with their strengths, goals, and comfort level. This impacts their person-environment fit and their motivation for career growth.

Strategies to integrate the four key EIL components—initiative, facilitating change, developing relationships, and managing conflict—into programming include:

- #1** • Encourage program leaders to model emotionally intelligent behavior, setting the tone for the group
- #2** • Assess frequently the impact of EIL strategies on leadership effectiveness and performance
- #3** • Expose young women to a variety of career mentors and role models to build their professional network
- #4** • Leverage leadership assessment tools to help young women identify their strengths
- #5** • Reinforce the difference between constructive and destructive conflict in everyday scenarios

To review our sources and learn more about the Generation YES program, scan here:

