

How Successful Is Teen Challenge?

After Teen Challenge was started the National Institute of Drug Abuse asked Rev. David Wilkerson how successful he thought his program was. Rev. Wilkerson thought that 70% of the Teen Challenge graduates were living drug free lives. Soon after this the federal government funded a one year study on the Teen Challenge program.

Graduates were contacted all over the United States and asked to participate in the study. At that time heroin was the major drug of choice. After completing their work a study was published presenting a 87.5% cure rate for Teen Challenge graduates.

Information on the NIDA study and one done at Northwestern University is below.

National Institute on Drug Abuse Report

National Institute On Drug Abuse Report



Teen Challenge claims of a 70% cure rate for the drug addicts graduation from their program attracted the attention of the U. S. Federal Government in 1973. Most secular drug rehabilitation programs only experienced a cure rate of 1 – 15% of their graduates. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, funded the first year of this study to evaluate the long term results of the Teen Challenge program.

This study focused on all students in the class of 1968 that Brooklyn, NY, Teen Challenge, and then transferred to Rehersburg, PA, for the second half of their training. This follow-up study seven years later (1975) sought to determine six variables: what proportion of the program participants were still drug free, no legal involvements, employed or pursuing education, a part of a family unit, participating in church activities and physical and mental health.

The survey was conducted under the leadership of Dr. Catherine Hess, M.D., the former assistant chief of the Cancer Control Program of the U.S. Public Health Service, who had previously served as the Medical Director for the New York Hospital Methadone Clinic. The main premise of the study was to demonstrate that introduction of a religious component into the treatment of drug addicts is the one aspect which produces the large success rate.

The National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago developed the survey instrument, located survey participants, conducted the personal interviews, and obtained a urine sample to test for drugs. The National Medical Services, Inc., of Philadelphia, PA, conducted the drug screening detection for this population.

Research results were categorized into three groups.

- P1 were students that entered Brooklyn Teen Challenge, but dropped out and never attended the Rehrersburg program.
- P2 were students that completed the Brooklyn program who later dropped out of the Rehrersburg program.
- P3 were graduates of the Rehrersburg Training Center program.

A total of 186 persons were interviewed for this project, P1=70, P2=52, and P3=63. The P3 group of 64 represented 97% of the total population possible. The results of this survey clearly indicated the success of the Teen Challenge program in the following areas:

- The Teen Challenge definition of “drug-free” means abstaining from all use of narcotics, marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes. 67% of the graduates (P3) are drug-free as indicated by the urinalysis test. (86% stated they were drug-free on the questionnaire.)
- 72% of the graduates (P3) continued their education upon completion of Teen Challenge. The areas include getting their G.E.D., or pursuing college level education.
- 75% of the graduates (p3) indicated their current status as employed. 73% of the graduates are self-supporting by earning their own salary. Of those who are currently employed, 58% have been at their present job for over one year.
- 87.5% of the graduates did not require additional treatment in drug treatment programs after leaving Teen Challenge. Over 90% considered themselves addicted to drugs before entering Teen Challenge.
- 67% of the graduates are regularly attending church. 57% of the graduates are involved in church work.
- 92% of the graduates (P3) report good-excellent health, whereas the numbers are significantly lower for the other two groups, P1=59% and P2=75%.

Northwestern Study of Success

[New study confirms again Teen Challenge high cure rate!](#)



A study supervised by Northwestern University in Illinois proved again that 86% of Teen Challenge graduates remain drug free after completing the Teen Challenge Program.

The study lasted three years and included graduates from across the United States. The study’s findings demonstrate a marked difference between secular drug treatment programs and Teen Challenge. This survey, like others, attributed the success of Teen Challenge to its spiritual aspect, known as the “Jesus Factor.”

The study was consistent with the findings of a 1994 University of Tennessee study that also showed a phenomenal success rate. The study says that:

Nearly all graduates have escaped the “revolving door phenomenon” of substance abuse treatment. Most students in the program felt that it was a privilege to be there and were thankful for the program. Graduates described their experience at Teen Challenge as revolutionary.

84% of graduates attend church

Most secular programs cost from \$7,500 to \$3,500 for one month. Teen Challenge can help a person for an entire year for a fraction of the cost.

Graduates were more likely to be living normal lives, holding down jobs, and not needing further treatment. The two most powerful features of the program are: work training and discipline.

Only 41% of other programs’ graduates were employed one and two years later, and 91% of Teen Challenge graduates were employed.

Society need not write off drug abusers; cures can be expected. Productive participation in society by former addicts is not unrealistic

EXCERPT FROM WIKIPEDIA

Studies of program effectiveness

In 1973, Archie Johnston compared results of Teen Challenge with that of a [transactional analysis](#) approach at a Terminal Island Federal Correctional Institution therapeutic community, and with a third group who received no treatment.

While the numbers of subjects was small (17 in each group), he found evidence to support his recommendation that, while Teen Challenge was an "effective" treatment (with a drug recidivism rate after 29 months of 32%), Transactional Analysis was a "very effective" treatment (with a comparable 16% rate), suggesting that perhaps the lower recidivism rates were a result of TA changing the addiction concept of the self-image more thoroughly and at a slower pace. He hoped that Teen Challenge would incorporate some psychotherapy into their treatment model.^[12]

A Wilder Research study of 154 former residents who graduated between 2007 and 2009 reported that:^[13]

- 74 percent of adult program graduates reported no use in the previous six months
- 58 percent had attended school since graduating
- 77 percent were either working 30+ hours a week or were a full-time student
- 80+ percent rated the overall quality of MnTC as “outstanding” or “very good.”
- When asked to name what helped most, the faith-based aspects of the program were mentioned most frequently.

Aaron Bicknese tracked down 59 former Teen Challenge students in 1995, in order to compare them with a similar group of addicts who had spent one or two months in a hospital rehabilitation program. His results, part of his PhD dissertation, were published in "The Teen Challenge Drug Treatment Program in Comparative Perspective"^[14]

Bicknese found that Teen Challenge graduates reported returning to drug use less often than the hospital program graduates. His results also showed that Teen Challenge graduates were far more likely to be employed, with 18 of the 59 working at Teen Challenge itself, which relies in part on former clients to run the program.

Much of these results were to Teen Challenge's benefit, and the high success rates (up to 86%) he found have been quoted in numerous Teen Challenge and Christian Counseling websites.^[15]

According to a 2001 New York Times item,^[16] it is the opinion of some social scientists that the 86 percent success rate of Teen Challenge is misleading, as it does not count the people who dropped out during the program, and that, like many voluntary NGO's, Teen Challenge picks its clients. The item quotes the Rev. John D. Castellani, then president of Teen Challenge International U.S.A., as saying that most of the addicts have already been through detoxification programs, before they are admitted. In the program's first four-month phase, Castellani said, 25 to 30 percent drop out, and in the next eight months, 10 percent more leave. In their testimony before the [United States House Committee on Ways and Means](#), the [Texas Freedom Network](#) Education Fund, have similarly testified that the much-quoted success rates "dramatically distort the truth", due to the lack of reference to the high drop-out rate.^[17] Doug Wever, author of, "The Teen Challenge Therapeutic Model" has stated, "I would respectfully suggest that the Texas Freedom Network's position here is overstated in that it's not unusual at all for the research design of effectiveness studies to look only at graduates; therefore the outcomes of these independent studies do provide a legitimate and dramatic basis for comparison given the results. At the same time, Teen Challenge must be careful to communicate what has actually been measured."^[18]