

## **Overview of Northwestern University Research Project 1999**

Northwestern University produced a major study of Teen Challenge graduates from across the USA, surveying graduates of the three largest Teen Challenge centers. This research project, conducted by PhD candidate Aaron Bicknese, was the first of its kind to survey Teen Challenge graduates on a national scope.

The focus of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the Teen Challenge approach to treatment of drug and alcohol addiction by surveying graduates who had been out of Teen Challenge for 12, 18 and 24 months. Results indicated that Teen Challenge had great success with those who came from severely dysfunctional family backgrounds with long term addictions.

The three Teen Challenge centers providing the source of graduates for this research project are located in Rehrersburg, PA, Cape Girardeau, MO, and Riverside, CA. These centers work with males only. Teen Challenge operates 150 centers in the USA serving both males and females. Internationally, Teen Challenge operates an additional 150+ centers in over 70 countries.

Following is a summary of the key findings of this research project.

- \*Participants in the study: 31% Afro-American, 18% Hispanic, Native American, or East Indian, 51% Caucasian
- \*81% had lived most of their lives in urban settings.
- \*33% had not earned a high school diploma before entering Teen Challenge. 52% had a high school diploma or GED. 14% had education beyond high school.
- \*The average survey participant had been arrested at least 3 times in the 12 months before entering Teen Challenge. Only 7% of the graduates of Teen Challenge had been arrested in the 6 months preceding the survey.
- \*Before entering Teen Challenge, 86% had used drugs other than alcohol at least weekly. The average participant had used over 2 different types of drugs at least weekly before entering Teen Challenge. 56% were using alcohol daily before entering Teen Challenge. 80% were smoking cigarettes before entering Teen Challenge.
- \*70% had been in other drug treatment programs before entering Teen Challenge. None of the Teen Challenge graduates had returned to a drug treatment program after graduating from Teen Challenge.
- \*86% of the graduates of Teen Challenge were found to be living drug free. 71% of the graduates surveyed were abstaining from drugs and alcohol. 85% of the graduates were no longer smoking cigarettes.

\*90% of the graduates of Teen Challenge were holding a full time job at the time of the survey.

\*One of the key distinctives of the Teen Challenge model in its treatment of drug addicts is the significant emphasis placed on the spiritual component. Teen Challenge teaches that each person must enter into a personal relationship with God, and begin to change behaviors and thought patterns to match the teachings of the Bible. Teen Challenge seeks not just to change the drug use patterns of its residents, but to change their whole world view.

29% of the survey participants attended church weekly before entering Teen Challenge. 90% of these same individuals attend church weekly at the time of the survey. 79% of the Teen Challenge graduates are involved in a church small group of some sort, with 67% attending several times a month.

\*When asked why they no longer used drugs, Teen Challenge graduates listed their personal relationship with God was the key to this change in their lives. They also stated their belief that the absence of dealing with the spiritual component of their lives was the reason they had been unsuccessful in breaking free from their drug addiction in other drug treatment programs they had attended before coming to Teen Challenge.

A more detailed description of this study is available at the Teen Challenge website:

[www.iTeenChallenge.org](http://www.iTeenChallenge.org)

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