



## How Effective is Living Free?

A Study of Perceptions of Participants

May 2013

### **Need**

Living Free, since its inception 25 years ago, has ministered to over a million people in seeking God and His Word for answers to dealing with life's problems. This is the third consecutive year in which outcomes research has been conducted with its participants for the purposes of 1) programmatic improvement, 2) identification of future curricular needs, and 3) accountability to supporters, stakeholders, and constituents.

Unlike the previous research, the current study focuses solely on one segment of Living Free -- the community-based component known as "Living Free Community," a ministry to those struggling with addictions. Partnering with Teen Challenge in some locations and with faith communities in a growing number of states, this ministry began to spread as its success became remarkably apparent to the judicial system. Now with a rapidly growing presence in communities across the nation, Living Free Community is the focus of this study.

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 181 participants from 22 groups in a total 5 different states. Demographic data are found in Tables 1 and 2.

### **Method**

A survey was undertaken, using a questionnaire with five statements to which the respondents were asked to answer on a scale of 1-4. Additionally, they were asked to respond to two write-in questions. Thus the quantitative data provided a broad view of responses aggregated by item and by each group, and the qualitative data provided a deeper perspective through the respondents' write-in answers.

The questionnaires were distributed at the final session of the class and were then returned to the Living Free headquarters for compilation and analysis. Using a 4-point Likert scale, each item was scored as follows:

1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Agree    4 = Strongly Agree

Mean and standard deviation scores were calculated for 1) each item for each group, 2) each group as an entity, 3) each item for the composite groups, 4) all groups of a specific geographic locality, and 5) all items/all groups composite. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was computed to ascertain any significant differences among the groups and localities. The qualitative data were recorded, noted and examined for recurrent themes and patterns, which were then collapsed into categories according to frequency.

### **Findings**

The findings revealed the overall mean to be 3.55, indicating that more respondents checked "Strongly Agree" than "Agree" with the items. Furthermore, the minimal variation in means among all five items as well as the low standard deviation for each item, again indicates a remarkable consistency in responses (Table 3). A one-way ANOVA found no statistically significant difference among the groups, which suggests that the effectiveness remains consistent regardless of group and locality.

The two write-in responses yielded considerable depth and richness. Nearly every respondent answered the first question: "What specific changes have you made in your life as a result of the Living Free group?" Many of the write-ins described multiple changes in their lives. The categories appear below in descending order showing the number of responses in parentheses.

1. Specific behavioral changes, e.g., stopped drug and alcohol usage, improved family relationships (113).
2. Deeper relationship with God, e.g., turned life over to God, praying, studying Bible (91).
3. Development of insight and identification of issues, e.g., forgiving and letting go of past, better outlook and understanding of life (25).

The respondents were very specific in their write-ins:

- "Forgiving others. I am no longer a bitter angry person."
- "I am clean and sober. And I now am a responsible person."
- "I am so thankful to this class because it has given me such hope and inspiration that I can carry on with my family when I get out, because I have destroyed my life in my past because of the drugs and Satan that closed my eyes to the good things that could have happened in my life. Thank you for the time and consideration you have put forth to the class that I have attended."

The second write-in item asked for completion of the sentence, "The least helpful part of the Living Free Group(s) has been. . ." The vast majority of the respondents continued with positive statements, such as "It's all been a very big help in my life. It all was and still, a major part of my life." The remaining responses dealt with time constraints, such as wishing the meetings convened twice as week and desiring more time for each session, and the lack of relevance of portions of study to their individual situation.

### **Limitations**

Inherent in any study is the limitation of bias when the findings are based upon participants' self-report. Yet in this type of group, one of the goals is self-awareness, and thus it may be argued that the respondents would exhibit greater self-awareness and thereby report with greater accuracy. Another limitation is the use of different group facilitators, making uniformity of leadership impossible. However, the curriculum is highly structured and the facilitators' manuals are meticulously detailed so that a high degree of standardization can be assumed. Despite these limitations, the data remain valuable in providing a reasonable form of feedback of participants' perceptions of their growth as a result their Living Free experience.

### **Conclusions**

Based upon both the quantitative and qualitative data, the respondents reported the experience to be highly valuable as suggested by high means and low standard deviations of all items, all groups, and all localities. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference among groups, indicating that regardless of the specific Living Free course or the locality, the effectiveness remains consistent. This is all the more remarkable when the uncontrolled variable of the use of different facilitators is considered. The write-in responses yielded rich insight into the respondents' life-changing experiences. Drug and alcohol cessation was the most frequently reported change. The paucity of responses to the question asking for the least helpful part of the group and the unsolicited positive feedback in response to this question, as well as the specific behavioral changes and the emotional and spiritual growth reported, suggest an extremely valuable experience. That such transformative changes are possible within such a short time frame provides compelling confirmation for the effectiveness of Living Free Community.

**Table 1. Gender and Marital Status\***

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Single</b>	22	23
<b>Married</b>	28	26
<b>Divorced</b>	15	12
<b>Widowed</b>	2	3

**Table 2. Age\***

<b>Under 18</b>	2
<b>18-35</b>	79
<b>36-50</b>	57
<b>51-65</b>	27
<b>Over 65</b>	2

\*not all reported

**Table 3. Item Mean and Standard Deviation**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1. This group has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others	181	3.59	.526
2. My thoughts, attitudes and actions reflect a positive change as a result of attending this group(s).	181	3.57	.539
3. I now take greater responsibility for myself and my behavior than when I first began this group.	180	3.58	.548
4. I am now relating in more healthy ways with my family and others as a result of this group.	180	3.47	.592
5. Because of this group, I am better able to make wiser choices in my daily life.	180	3.59	.547