



How Effective is Living Free?

A Study of Perception of Participants

May 2016

Need

Living Free, since its inception 28 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 fourth year in which outcomes research has been conducted with the participants for the purposes of 1) programmatic improvement, 2) identification of future curricular needs, and 3) accountability to supporters, stakeholders, and constituents.

The current study focuses on two segments of Living Free: 1) "Living Free Community," a community-based ministry to those struggling with addictions and their families; for the purposes of this research, included in this group is also church-based outreach ministry to this population, and 2) Transformation Project, the ministry to addiction-related offenders and their families.

Sample

The sample consisted of 225 participants from 25 groups in a total of 11 locations in 4 different states. Demographic data are found in Table 1.

Method

A survey was undertaken, using two different questionnaires – one for Living Free Community and the other for Transformation Project -- each 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 presented a broad view of responses aggregated by item and by 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) composite for each group, 3) each item for the Living Free Community segment and each item for the Transformation Project segment, 4) composite for each of these two segments. Additionally, ANOVAs were computed to ascertain significant differences among the groups and localities. The qualitative data were recorded, noted and analyzed for recurring themes and patterns, which were then collapsed into these emergent categories.

Findings

The findings revealed the composite mean score for Living Free Community to be 3.54 and for Transformation Project to be 3.51, indicating that more respondents checked "Strongly Agree" than "Agree." The mean scores for each item for Transformation Project and for Living Free Community are displayed in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. A one-way ANOVA found no statistically significant differences among the Transformation Project groups, which suggests that the outcomes remained consistent regardless of group. However, within one of the Living Free Community groups, the Tri-Cities Recovery Insight groups had statistically significant higher means in Items 3 and 4 than its Free to Grow group (Table

4). When compared by location entities, the Tri-Cities Recovery groups as a whole scored significantly higher on Items 2, 3, and 5 when compared to three other localities (Table 5).

The two write-in responses yielded considerable richness. Nearly every respondent answered the question, "What specific changes have you made in your life as a result of the Living Free group?" Many of the write-in's described multiple changes in their lives. The categories, examples, and numbers responding to that particular category are as follows:

1. Deeper relationship with God, e.g., "Turned my life over to God and have changed my whole life. I have hope and see a bright future. Getting closer to God, the closeness in the group. The life coaches are amazing. I love the whole program and what it stands for." (85).
2. Specific behavioral changes, e.g., "I've learned to have fun without alcohol. I haven't drank in 9 weeks & 3 days. I learned not to gossip 'cause God don't like ugly." (63).
3. Development of insight and identification of issues, e.g., "Taking more personal responsibility for my actions, have been taking more assessments in my interactions, I find myself talking to God more." (51).
4. Improved relationships, e.g., "Learned to trust God, learned to walk in the Spirit not flesh. Restoration - like a restoration company restores a damaged home, God has restored me and my marriage." (40)

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 "Nothing. Everything from this group has helped me. Also all the support. Thank you." "I think this group is perfect so far. I don't think there is anything that needs to change." The remaining responses dealt with 1) time constraints, such as limited time for the series or duration of each session, or going through each session too quickly and cutting off sharing, 2) people transitioning in and out of the group, 3) overly talkative members, 4) more friendly user language and format of book.

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 honesty. Another limitation is the use of different group facilitators, making uniformity of leadership is impossible. However, the curriculum is highly structured and the facilitator's manuals are meticulously detailed 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' perception of growth as a result the Living Free experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

The possibility of respondents mistakenly checking the wrong boxes on the questionnaire surfaced. Two of the respondents who had checked "Strongly Disagree" for each item wrote extremely positive comments in the write-in section. Another respondent had checked "Strongly Disagree" for each item but then crossed it out and replaced each with "Strongly Agree." Because "Strongly Disagree" boxes appear in the first column, the respondents may have automatically checked the wrong column, which suggests that the mean scores may be even higher.

In conclusion, the high mean scores and low standard deviations of all items, all groups, and all localities, as well as the write-in responses suggest an extremely positive experience for the respondents. Further confirmation can be made by their description of specific behavioral changes and emotional and spiritual growth. That such transformative changes are possible within such a short time frame provides compelling confirmation for the effectiveness of Living Free.

Table 1. Demographics*

Gender	Transformation	Living Free Community
Male	11	98
Female	18	78
Marital Status		
Single	9	55
Married	16	71
Divorced	2	24
Widowed	1	2
Age		
Under 18	0	3
18-35	9	80
36-50	16	59
51-65	2	37
Over 65	1	7

*not all reported

Table 2. Item Mean and Standard Deviation for Transformation Project

Item	N	Mean	Std Dev
1. My thoughts, attitudes and actions reflect a positive change because I have greater freedom in Christ through this Living Free book.	31	3.55	0.506
2. I can identify at least one self-defeating behavior/defense that I am now working on as I seek greater emotional and spiritual health.	31	3.48	0.677
3. This Transformation Project group and Living Free book has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others.	31	3.52	0.677
4. I have seen positive change in the way I relate to my family and others as a result of this Transformation Project group & Living Free.	31	3.42	0.672
5. Because of this Transformation Project group, I am becoming more compassionate towards those who are struggling with life issues.	31	3.58	0.672

Table 3. Item Mean and Standard Deviation for Living Free Community and Church-Based Outreach

Item	N	Mean	Std Dev
1. This group has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others.	194	3.59	0.571
2. My thoughts, attitudes and actions reflect a positive change as a result of attending this group(s).	194	3.53	0.586
3. I now take greater responsibility for myself and my behavior than when I first began this group.	191	3.51	0.579
4. I am now relating in more healthy ways with my family and others as a result of this group.	192	3.51	0.551
5. Because of this group, I am better able to make wiser choices in my daily life.	191	3.55	0.559

Table 4. Items with Statistically Significant Differences within Living Free Community Groups

Item	Group	Group	
3. I now take greater responsibility for myself and my behavior than when I first began this group.	Tri-Cities Insight 1	Tri-Cities Free to Grow	0.036
4. I am now relating in more healthy ways with my family and others as a result of this group.	Tri-Cities Insight 1	Tri-Cities Free to Grow	0.006
	Tri-Cities Insight 2	Tri-Cities Free to Grow	0.020

Table 5. Items with Statistically Significant Differences by Location Entity

Item	Group	Group	
2. My thoughts, attitudes and actions reflect a positive change as a result of attending this group(s).	Tri-Cities Recovery	Cloverhill Assembly Church	0.043
3. I now take greater responsibility for myself and my behavior than when I first began this group.	Tri-Cities Recovery	Lifeline Connection	0.031
5. Because of this group, I am better able to make wiser choices in my daily life.	Tri-Cities Recovery	Southtown Christian Center	0.005