

Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ

The Wyman Teen Outreach Program©

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1. What is the Wyman Teen Outreach Program (TOP)?

Teen Outreach is a program based on the principles of positive youth development that is designed to meet the needs of adolescents during the transitional period in which they are growing into adulthood. TOP combines curriculum-guided experiential activities and discussion plus community service work in a program that supports positive youth development and prevents negative youth behaviors, such as early pregnancy and school failure.

2. How does TOP work?

TOP's youth development approach is flexible enough to be used in various settings that serve adolescents. Local programs can be school led, community sponsored or an equal partnership between schools and community. For example, TOP can be —

- 1) *offered as an in-school strategy integrated with core subjects;*
- 2) *offered as an in-school elective;*
- 3) *positioned as an after-school voluntary program; and/or*
- 4) *designed as a component of out-of-school enrichment programs, such as, social clubs, recreation programs, mentoring and tutoring initiatives, service learning programs, and various after-school and "gap" time activities.*

TOP typically operates on a nine-month or school year cycle and some programs last year-round. Although program affiliates construct local programs to meet the needs and concerns of their communities, research suggests that certain minimum levels of participation in both the community service and curriculum components of the program are critical to TOP's effectiveness. To realize the level of outcomes found in the TOP evaluation, local programs should offer participants at least —

- 1 to 2 group discussion/activity sessions per week and
- a minimum of 20 hours of community service per program year (i.e., nine months or academic school year)

Local program sponsors must develop a process that permits adaptation and evolution, while maintaining the “essential integrity” of the program for which the ultimate measure is outcomes.

3. What age youth can be served in TOP?

TOP is designed to meet the developmental needs of adolescents ages 12-17.

4. What research has been done on TOP?

Over more than 20 years, TOP has been evaluated using rigorous experimental techniques of comparison and control groups, both randomly and non-randomly assigned. Evaluations have consistently demonstrated lower pregnancy rates and higher school success among TOP participants in comparison to non-participants.

Local programs that successfully replicate TOP’s framework and maintain stated thresholds of youth participation in the community and discussion components can have significant impact on the lives of youth. In the long-term evaluation of Teen Outreach, conducted by Philliber Research Associates (PRA) since 1981, TOP participants, when measured against comparison groups, consistently demonstrate—

- ▲ 11% Lower Rate of Course Failure in School
- ▲ 14% Lower Rate of School Suspension
- ▲ 33% Lower Rate of Pregnancy
- ▲ 60% Lower Rate of School Dropout

5. Has TOP been recognized as a best practice?

TOP is recognized on best practice and evidence-based practice lists nationwide.

- ✓ National Academy of Science’s Institute of Medicine
- ✓ Child Trends – Guide to Effective Programs for Children and Youth
- ✓ OJJDP (Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention): Model Programs Guide (MPG)
- ✓ The Rand Corporation’s Promising Practices Network – “Programs that Work”
- ✓ The Brookings Institution – “Cost-Effective Investments in Children”
- ✓ Helping America’s Youth – Office of the First Lady
- ✓ Advocates for Youth – “Programs that Work”
- ✓ The New York City Commission for Economic Opportunity
- ✓ Harvard Family Research Project
- ✓ American Youth Policy Forum
- ✓ National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
- ✓ Dr. Marvin Berkowitz – “What Works in Character Education”
- ✓ Dr. Doug Kirby – “Emerging Answers”

6. Why does TOP work?

Teen Outreach is one of only a few programs proven effective in both preventing teen pregnancy and increasing school success. A study [1] conducted by Dr. Susan Philliber, Philliber Research Associates, and Dr. Joseph Allen, Ph.D., University of Virginia, among 695 students in 25 sites nationwide suggests that TOP is successful

because it provides young people with several of the elements critical to positive youth development —

- a “safe place” to express their innermost thoughts and feelings about their psychosocial development;
- structured volunteer community service, which is increasingly being linked to positive outcomes for young people;
- a forum for understanding and evaluating their future life options;
- opportunities to establish competence and autonomy in a context that maintains their sense of relatedness with important adults;
- opportunities (through volunteer work) to take on adult roles in ways that do not necessarily undermine parental or school authority structures;
- an opportunity to be viewed in a positive role by adults and other youth.

TOP is routinely recommended by national reports as a positive youth development approach worth replicating. In “Community Programs to Promote Youth Development”, the National Institute of Medicine cites TOP as a “program that stands out as {a} model”. [2] In its recent report “Copy That: Guidelines for Replicating Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy”, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy identifies TOP as a model program that has been well evaluated, proven effective in its outcomes, and is feasible for organizations and communities to adopt and replicate. [3]

[1] J.P. Allen, Susan Philliber, Scott Herrling, et al. “Preventing Teen Pregnancy and Academic Failure: Experimental Evaluation of a Developmentally-based Approach”. *Child Development*, 64:729-742, 1997.

7. What topics does the curriculum include?

The Teen Outreach Program features four flexible levels of curriculum, as well as an integrated community service learning guide. The four levels of curriculum are age-appropriate to the needs of adolescents ages 12-17, are designed to be interactive and engaging, and cover a wide variety of developmental topics of interest to teens. TOP emphasizes universal values of respect, justice, and service to others. It is important to understand that TOP aims to support youth in learning critical thinking skills therefore we create a neutral environment where many ideas and points of view can be shared and explored without judgment.

Core activities across the curriculum levels include:

- ▲ Values Clarification: Teens explore and challenge their own values, the impact of gender roles on values, the values of their family and friends, and the impact of the larger society on their value formation.
- ▲ Relationships: Teens examine the dynamics of friendships, family relationships and conflicts, peer pressure, romantic relationships, dating, and violence within relationships.
- ▲ Communication/Assertiveness: Teens discuss and apply concepts such as active listening, assertive communication, nonverbal communication, how to say “no” and refuse a request, the use of “I” messages, and how to utilize personal and community resources to meet their needs.
- ▲ Influence: Teens explore and grapple with the various influences on their lives and decisions, including peer pressure and media messages.

- ▲ Goal-Setting: Teens practice goal identification, understand short-term versus long-term goals, explore their future options, think about plans for life after high-school, and discuss the potential impact of teen parenting on their future plans.
- ▲ Decision-Making: Teens examine choices and consequences, practice using decision-making tools, and reflect upon recent decisions they have made.
- ▲ Development and Human Sexuality: Teens learn about adolescent development (emotional and physical) and human sexuality from a holistic perspective. The curriculum is designed as an abstinence-plus approach. This technique provides information on abstinence as the safest way to not become pregnant/father a child and to remain free of any sexually-transmitted diseases. Information on the reproductive process and contraception is also provided, however, for teens to make informed choices about their sexual activity. Each organization and community can tailor the human sexuality content to their and the teens' particular needs.
- ▲ Community Service Learning: Each year, teens engage in community service learning. The curriculum provides a series of activities and techniques to help teens identify service opportunities, plan service projects, and, most importantly, reflect on and learn from their service experience.

8. Why is service learning such an important part of TOP?

There is a robust body of evidence that community service learning provides multiple benefits to youth. We encourage you to visit Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org) for research documents and resources. In summary, the benefits of service learning for students include:

- ✓ Increased engagement, better attendance and motivation to learn
- ✓ Academic improvement
- ✓ Improved higher order thinking skills
- ✓ Development of personal and social skills
- ✓ Fostering stronger ties to schools, communities and society
- ✓ Promotion of career exploration

Service learning helps with overall adolescent development by providing supports and opportunities for youth to:

- ✓ Develop a sense of competence, testing and discovering new skills
- ✓ Discover a place for themselves and create a vision of a personal future
- ✓ Participate in projects that have visible outcomes
- ✓ Know a variety of adults from different backgrounds and occupations
- ✓ Have the freedom to take part in the world of adults with structure and appropriate boundaries
- ✓ Test value systems in authentic and safe settings
- ✓ Speak and be heard and feel they can make a difference
- ✓ Be recognized for their accomplishments
- ✓ Have opportunities to make real decisions within appropriate limits
- ✓ Receive support and guidance from adults who appreciate their promise as well as their challenges.

9. What types of community service learning projects do youth select?

Below is a list of ideas generated by youth for service in their communities:

- ✓ *Indirect Service (supports individuals, but without direct interaction)*
 - *Flea market fund raiser*
 - *Bake sales*
 - *Clothing drive*
 - *Canned food drive*
 - *Penny drive*
 - *Car Wash*
 - *Contests*
 - *Blood drive*
 - *Dance-a-Thon*
 - *Painting over negative graffiti*

- ✓ *Direct Service (supports individuals and includes personal interactions)*
 - *Tutoring younger children*
 - *Build a playground or garden with the community*
 - *Peer mediation*
 - *Visit residents of a nursing home or VA hospital*
 - *Meals-on-Wheels*
 - *Bringing a performance to a shelter, nursing home or hospital*
 - *Distribute food at a shelter or food pantry*
 - *Operate a day camp or after school program for children*
 - *Playing games with young children or rocking babies at an emergency shelter*

- ✓ *Civic Action (working to educate or advocate on community issues)*
 - *Neighborhood mapping*
 - *Voter registration drive*
 - *Educational theatre, radio or public speaking*
 - *Tabling/handing out information*
 - *HIV/AIDS awareness programs*
 - *Speaking at school board or other public meetings*
 - *Presentations to elected officials*
 - *Petition drives*

10. Where is TOP being offered?

- ✓ *TOP is currently offered in 37 states and territories in the USA*
- ✓ *If you are operating a Teen Outreach Program – please contact us to make sure your information is up to date in our registry!*
- ✓ *Coming soon! Wyman will have a complete listing of operating TOP affiliates in 2008.*

11. Can I find a Teen Outreach Program for my child?

By contacting Wyman you can find out if there is an active TOP affiliate in your area. You may also wish to share the information on this website with your local school, public health organization, youth center or community based organization. Wyman can help those organizations begin TOP with training, technical assistance and quality assurance.

12. How is TOP funded?

A wide array of funding sources may be explored when planning your start-up and on-going support for TOP. There is a strong interest by funders in supporting programs, like TOP, that are evidence-based. Funding is frequently directed by those who are interested in the educational outcomes of the program, as well as those who target public health issues related to adolescents. We urge you to consider the following sources:

- ✓ *Federal and state grants related to youth development, drop-out prevention and teen pregnancy reduction.*
- ✓ *Private foundations (local, state and national) that identify youth development, service learning, teen pregnancy prevention, or high school drop out reduction as a key agenda.*
- ✓ *Local business leaders who are interested in graduation rates and seek a future workforce with the skills and capacity they need.*
- ✓ *Individuals in your community who are passionate about youth and show concern for the challenges and opportunities facing young people today.*

13. What are the costs to start and to operate TOP?

TOP takes space, materials, and personnel, which require consistent and predictable financial support. The good news is that TOP is a relatively inexpensive program. TOP affiliates generally spend between \$500 - \$1,000 per participant per school year. Institutionalization of the Teen Outreach Program can be one of the most effective ways to give stability and continuity to local efforts.

Institutionalization can be accomplished by incorporating TOP into existing core curricula, by attaching the program to core operational funding, and by adopting TOP to fulfill requirements of major initiatives (e.g., statewide teen pregnancy prevention mandates or service learning requirements)—all of which offer long-term funding. Around the country creative TOP affiliates have found many ways to generate community support for the program in the form of cash, in-kind, and donated resources.

On our website you can find our training menu (including costs) and an order form for TOP curriculum and materials.

14. What does the TOP National Office at Wyman offer?

Wyman provides a range of services that make it possible for organizations, communities, and other interested groups to enhance the development of young people through TOP. The process of a comprehensive effort to support TOP start-up and implementation generally includes the following steps:

- ✓ *TOP facilitators & administrators attend a 2 ½ day training facilitated by Wyman. Training includes an overview of TOP, practice facilitating sessions, and a review of community service learning practice. TOP curriculum sets are purchased as part of training.*
- ✓ *Organizations design a plan and begin to deliver TOP within their settings. Each TOP club generally meets 1-2 times per week during the regular school year, hosts 20-30 teens, and includes 20+ hours of community service learning opportunities.*
- ✓ *Wyman is available to provide on-going technical assistance and quality assessment to affiliates on topics related to the start-up and implementation of their Teen Outreach Program.*

15. What does training include?

The two and a half day training covers that which affiliates need to begin their Teen Outreach Program. We strongly recommend the broader package of training, materials and technical assistance so that you can have deeper support, especially in your first year of delivery. Training topics include:

- ✓ *An introduction, history, goals, frameworks, “tens steps to TOP” and an overview of why TOP is successful.*
- ✓ *Modeling sample lessons from the program.*
- ✓ *Review of the Classroom components.*
- ✓ *Review of Adolescent Development and Foundations of Youth Development.*
- ✓ *Review of experiences of TOP youth.*
- ✓ *Training on teaching on sensitive subjects and understanding facilitator boundaries.*
- ✓ *Training on preparing and implementing successful community service learning programs with teens.*
- ✓ *A visit to an operating TOP club in St. Louis. Note: If the timing of the training does not allow for this, it will be offered as part of the “booster sessions” later in the year.*
- ✓ *Practice sessions by participants in preparing and facilitating TOP lessons and guided discussions.*
- ✓ *Constructive feedback for facilitators on their practice sessions.*
- ✓ *Action planning for each team to take TOP back to their community. This includes conducting local needs assessment and establishing a timeline and benchmarks for implementing the TOP program.*

16. What types of organizations or professionals utilize TOP?

TOP is currently operated in a wide array of settings and institutions. These include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ *Middle and high schools*
- ✓ *After-school & 21st Century programs*
- ✓ *Youth development agencies*
- ✓ *Recreation centers*
- ✓ *University-led programs for youth*
- ✓ *Counseling and prevention programs*
- ✓ *Public health programs*
- ✓ *Rural, suburban, and urban areas*
- ✓ *Tribal land youth programs*
- ✓ *Juvenile justice programs*

17. What qualifications does someone need to deliver TOP?

First and foremost an effective Teen Outreach Program requires quality, caring facilitators. We also see the need for administrative and support persons so that facilitators can put their focus on the relationships with teens and the quality of their facilitation. We identify a great TOP facilitator as one who:

- ✓ *Genuinely cares and is compassionate to teens*
- ✓ *Finds joy in working with adolescents*
- ✓ *Consistently models healthy and positive behaviors and relationships*
- ✓ *Places the safety and well being of the youth in their care as the highest priority*
- ✓ *Understands and faithfully follows the TOP approach*
- ✓ *Is knowledgeable of adolescent development and current issues impacting teens*

- ✓ *Sets a tone of support and acceptance so teens can express and explore differently ways of thinking and being*
- ✓ *Believes in and fosters youth voice and choice in the program, especially in service learning*
- ✓ *Does not impose their personal values on teens*
- ✓ *Represents themselves and the TOP youth well to the community*
- ✓ *Guides discussions and activities with enthusiasm and inclusion*

TOP Frequently Asked Questions is edited periodically. If you have a question you would like to have included, please contact Claire Wyneken at clairew@wymancenter.org.

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