

**2019
TEEN
LEADERSHIP
WORKSHOP
EVALUATION**



**The Torch
Foundation**
@TheTorchFoundation

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<https://www.thetorchfoundation.org/>

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Introduction

This evaluation will summarize participant demographics and quantitative and qualitative pre-and post-test measures of the efficacy of the Torch Foundation's Teen Leadership Workshops conducted in July, October and December of 2019. As stated on their website, (<https://www.thetorchfoundation.org/what-we-do>), "The Torch Foundation is committed to helping every teen reach their full potential by nurturing and improving their self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and leadership skills." the workshops are "transformational.. [and] tailored to the unique interests and needs of teens, that provide a safe, engaging, and inspirational environment for profound self-discovery and growth."

Methods

Workshops took place over a 2-day weekend with approximately 16 hours of interaction for the participants. The website states that:

Highly experienced trainers and staff will coach teens to produce extraordinary results in all areas of their lives, including:

- Self-awareness, self-worth
- Accountability and responsibility
- Relationship with family members, peers, and community
- Communication skills
- Leadership skills
- Emotional Intelligence
- Health and self-care

For purposes of this evaluation, the bulleted items above will be considered program objectives, but it is important to note that there are different objectives listed on different sections of the website. It is important to articulate program objectives, have them consistently stated in public documents, and have a shared vision of these objectives among those who are responsible for administering and overseeing the program. Internally, this may already be the case, but is unclear from the outward facing website and therefore unclear if the instruments measure the primary objectives anticipated after participation in the program.

Pre- and post-tests were administered to assess success in achieving stated objectives. These instruments consist of 14 quantitative questions and 3 qualitative questions.

There are ethical issues in two of the questions that this evaluator feels compelled to bring to your attention ***in order to protect the Torch Foundation from legal liability***. These two questions would likely require full review by an ***Institutional Review Board***. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a body that is set up to protect the rights and welfare of human participants. *Without this approval, the foundations puts itself in a position of potential legal liability if any harm comes to a participant.* For basic information about federal guidelines for IRBs, you can refer to the following website: <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/institutional-review-boards-frequently-asked-questions>. While there are exceptions to the rules, they are complex and in this evaluator's opinion, the information you gain from these questions is not worth the effort to pursue this.

The first of these questions is ***"I think about ending my life."*** If one is asking a question about suicidality, there should be a mechanism for intervention in place. Typically, in a research setting, these answers would be anonymous and the researcher would be required to provide information about suicide prevention and

counseling resources in a debriefing document. In this case, where responses are identifiable because participant's names are on the forms, it could be argued that if someone indicates that they "always" (5 on the questionnaire) think about ending their life and no one reviewed and tried to intervene, that this might constitute negligence.

The second problematic question is "*I use drugs and alcohol*". Here you are asking participants to admit they are engaging in criminal activity since they are all under the legal age to drugs of any kind including alcohol. Again, this can be traced back to them since their names are on the forms and if harm came to them due to their drug use and it could be shown that someone in the foundation knew, or should have known, there is risk of legal liability.

These are serious ethical and legal concerns. More pragmatically, there is virtually no likelihood that participation in a 2-day workshop will have a significant difference in either of these issues. In the first, there may be a slight, positive change but if someone starts in a position of serious suicidal ideation whatever small change noted is not sufficient for harm reduction. Expert intervention is needed. In the case of the drug use question, the drug use has already occurred. It is not possible to have changed overnight.

Unfortunately, there were several methodological issues with these instruments, some minor and some major. First the minor ones. For some of the items, the wording was different on the pre- and post-tests but it is likely that it was close enough to serve as an adequate measure of change. On some surveys, the photocopying was slanted to the extent that the first part of the question was missing. Some people may have misinterpreted the question, a few wrote question marks next to it. The instruments were double-sided and did not prompt participants to turn the page over. Some participants did not fill out the back of the forms. More serious issues arose when pre- and post-test items did not match. An additional problem was that more than one version of the pre- and post-tests were utilized in a single administration, making it extremely difficult to organize the data.

Screen shots of the pre- and post-tests that show the pre-test and post-test questions side by side are provided in **Appendix A** organized by the date of administration. Questions with minor wording changes are marked with an . Question with opposite wording or totally different questions are marked with a red arrow



The discrepancies in these instruments posed tremendously labor-intensive, time-consuming difficulties in analyzing the data and resulted in vastly different response rates across questions. Thus, although there were 88 completed pre- and post-test paired responses, far fewer than that account for any given response to an individual question where there were discrepancies in the pre-and post-tests as noted above. The evaluator retrieved as much useful information as possible for each question and has summarized the results below.

It is noteworthy that last year's evaluator stated that she could not fully analyze the data for *one* of the administration dates because of discrepancies in the pre-tests and post-tests during that administration and that she felt this limited the usefulness of the data from that session to draw inferences about the program outcomes. She suggested relying on the data from the previous two sessions as she felt they were better indicators of program outcomes.

This year, the problem is significantly worse, with discrepancies not only in all three administrations but in some cases two different version in the same administration for a total of five different versions of the pre- and post-test pairs that compound the number of mismatches among individual items in each of these five versions. Thus, data from this year's surveys should be interpreted cautiously. Recommendations for rectifying these and other issues are included in the recommendations section. The Excel data set is a separate addendum to this evaluation.

Findings

Demographic Summary

A total of 88 pre- and post- test pairs were analyzed. The workshops were held in New Bedford, MA. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 18 with a mean age of 14.3. Participants came from 17 different schools ranging from middle school to community college.

Quantitative Data Summary

Table 1

The table below represents the data that could be retrieved from the pre-and post-test where the information was paired. In the case where the pre- and post-test questions were opposite, the item was reverse-scored before tabulation. Due to differences in the versions of the surveys, the total number of participants varies for each item. Each item was scored using a 5-point Likert scale where:

1=never and 5=always

| QUESTION | PRE | POST | CHANGE |
|---|------|------|---------|
| Generally I am pleased with who I am. | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.65% |
| I feel confident. | 3.9 | 4.4 | 11.36% |
| I sometimes get depressed. | 2 | 2 | -- |
| I am responsible. | 4 | 4.3 | 7.5% |
| I use drugs and/or alcohol. | 1.35 | 1.43 | 5.92% |
| I am honest and truthful with myself and others. | 4 | 4 | -- |
| I am a cooperative person. | 3.9 | 4.3 | 11.36% |
| My education is important to me, therefore I study. | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.76% |
| I feel hopeless. | 1.14 | 1 | -12.28% |
| I deal with my anger effectively. | 3.2 | 3.5 | 9.37% |
| I feel confident about achieving my dreams. | 3.8 | 4.5 | 18.42% |
| I keep my word. | 4.01 | 4.35 | 8.48% |

| | | | |
|---|------------|------------|---------------|
| I make an effort to get along with others. | 4 | 4 | -- |
| I communicate my feelings well. | 3.1 | 3.6 | 16.13% |

In general, there were positive changes across all of the quantitative questions, with the largest positive impact on confidence, cooperation, decreased hopelessness, confidence in achieving goals and communication.

Table 2

Additional quantitative questions were taken from the testimonials completed after the training. These questions asked participants if they were interested in becoming Torch Angels and/or Torch Peer Leaders. The results are listed in Table 2.

| | YES | % | NO | % |
|---|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Do you want to be a TORCH ANGEL? | 64 | 86.49 | 10 | 13.51 |
| Do you want to be a TORCH PEER LEADER? | 51 | 68.92 | 23 | 31.08 |

Qualitative Data Summaries

Both the pre- and post-tests contained three similarly worded qualitative questions. It is noteworthy that there were many questions left blank and much overlap between the first and third questions on both the pre- and post-tests. Recommendations to address this are presented at the end of this report. Common themes to answers on the pre-test are presented in Table 3 and for the post-test in Table 4. In both cases, the “future” item is difficult because many of the responses were very specific to career goals, but there were a few common themes.

Pre-Test

Table 3

| What challenges are you currently facing? | What do you see in your future? | What do you want to learn from this workshop? |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School • Emotions • Family/friends/relationships • Communication problems • Need job/money | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success • Family • Money • Specific career (e.g. doctor, hockey player) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Communication skills • Self-confidence • Help to reach my full potential/best self |

Post-Test

Table 4

| What tools did you learn in the training that you can use as you face challenges in your life? | When you look into the future, what do you see for yourself? | What did you gain from this experience? |
|---|---|--|
| | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with emotions/not bottling them up • Don't get stuck in the past • Speaking in front of crowds/ability to talk to others • Confidence • Be kinder to others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success • Family • Leader • Money • Specific career (e.g. doctor, hockey player) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Leadership • Ability to communicate • Dealing with emotions • Better attitude/more positive outlook |
|---|--|--|

Testimonial Summary

Participants were asked to *"Please share your experience of your Torch Training"*

In general, participants had positive experiences in the training. Many stated that it was powerful, eye opening, helped them get things off their chest, helped them gain friends, and handle their emotions. Some did say that they weren't expecting the level of emotional intensity (people crying and sharing emotions) that they experienced. The phrases "amazing" and "life changing" were notable. A sample of some of the longer testimonials are listed below.

Select Testimonials

"My experience has really opened my eyes. It has relieved me from stress. It has made me feel powerful and it helped me to really find myself and that's what I've had trouble with for a long time. I'm truly thankful for that."

"It was better than I expected. I really enjoyed it. It opened my eyes a lot and it taught me to change my ways and I can really be a better person. It also helped me put stuff in the past and focus on the future. I'm glad I did the program and my trainers are really great."

"I had an amazing experience with Torch and I am not afraid to express my feelings and have my goals set in the future. I am also not afraid to speak my mind to anyone that doubts me."

"The Torch Training was really fun and upsetting at the same time. It was fun because I made a lot of new friends. It was sad because of all the emotions going on."

"The Torch Training really opened my eyes to what is possible in the world and what I deserve. Taught me never to take anything for granted. To really love and appreciate everybody in your life."

"I've learned a lot not to blame myself for other people's mistakes. I've learned how to love myself more and not put myself down."

"I loved my Torch Training it was so helpful and at first I didn't want to go but when I did it was so fun. It gets you out of your comfort zone and gets you sharing your feelings on the inside."

"My experience of the Torch Training was amazing. I learned so much about life that would prepare me for the future. I am so grateful that I was able to join the Torch Training."

Recommendations

A recommendation of the 2018 report was to limit the pre- and post-tests to a one-sided instrument because several tests were left blank on the back side. This evaluator agrees that that would be ideal, but since there are many questions that need to be answered, at a minimum, the word "OVER" should be added at the bottom of the page to alert participants there are more questions on the reverse side.

An additional recommendation I would add relating to unanswered questions relates to the three qualitative questions at the end of the pre-and post-tests. Many of them were left blank. Once participants answer all the other questions, they often just want to be done. It would be useful to move those questions to the beginning of the survey to increase completion of the open-ended questions. Similarly, many of the answers to the open-ended questions were very similar. These questions could be re-written to elicit responses that differentiate between items.

Finally, it may be useful to see if the program provides more benefit for students from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds or for one gender or another so adding this demographic information might be useful. Research suggests that programs like these are universally beneficial but are often especially useful in decreasing educational and opportunity disparities. This might be something the foundation would like to highlight.

A sample of pre- and pos- tests with the following changes can be found in Appendix 2:

1. Addition of demographic information on race/ethnicity and gender
2. Move qualitative questions to beginning of survey
3. Revise wording of qualitative questions slightly to encourage more thoughtful, differentiated responses
4. Prompt participants to turn the page over to continue answering questions on the reverse side
5. Deletion of the questions on drug use and suicidality
6. Reformatting of quantitative questions to provide more clarity/ease of completion for participants

