

Qualitative and Quantitative Evaluation of *The Real Inside Story* program, a school-based substance abuse prevention program dedicated to educating students about the consequences of their health behaviors.

Prepared for Choice and Consequence

by

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Background

School-based substance abuse prevention programs have been suggested as beneficial strategies to reduce and/or prevent the number of adolescents who use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD). Tobacco use of Washington State's adolescents compares with adolescent use rates at the national level. Over 22% of Washington 12th graders, 15% of 10th graders, 9.2% of 8th graders and 2.2% of 6th graders have reported using tobacco in the past 30 days^{1,2}. Students who reported smoking tobacco, the "gateway" drug, are more likely to report using other drugs like alcohol, marijuana, or ecstasy¹.

Choice and Consequence, a 501(c)(3), public non-profit organization whose mission is to educate youth, through a substance abuse prevention program called, "The Real Inside Story (TRIS)", about the consequences of their health behaviors. As a complement to traditional substance abuse prevention programs, healthy and pathological human organs are used to demonstrate consequences of lifestyle choices. Choice and Consequence's TRIS program uses the organs as a tool for learning in a rational, small group discussion format with licensed health professionals and does not use scare tactics. The health professionals teaching the program are experts portraying important scientific materials about substance abuse in a fun, interactive and interesting manner. Choice and Consequence's (CC) unique teaching style and presentation techniques hold real meaning for students and its impact is apparent in their reaction to seeing the truth first-hand.

TRIS educational program inspires, motivates, and influences youth to choose new health behaviors, ensuring a healthy, productive future. CC provides a service to educators, contributing a reality element to existing substance abuse prevention programs. As part of the TRIS program, students get the opportunity of putting on gloves, view the organs up close, and feel the difference between healthy organs and those damaged from substance abuse. Presenters use personal stories that touch the affective domain of learning.

Much work is needed to counteract the influence of tobacco and alcohol advertising. Teens today place a high value on being real, as evidenced by the popularity and demand for reality-based television. The TRIS program presents with this in mind and the goal of minimizing a serious barrier to youth's learning, the belief that they are indestructible.

Objective

This evaluation was designed to examine the changes in students' health behaviors as a result of participating in "The Real Inside Story" program.

Methodology

Educators of CC have conducted thousands of TRIS, school-based presentations to students in grades K-12 in Snohomish County and across the state of Washington for over 15 years. After each presentation, a teacher, faculty member or a TRIS presenter asks students to share their experiences and reactions to the presentations. There are two measures that CC use to track students' experiences and reactions to the presentation: 1) personal letters from students and 2) post-presentation questionnaires that were examined to measure the changes in students' health behaviors as a result of TRIS. Evaluation methods for the two measures CC have used is explained in detail below:

Personal Letters from Students

At the time of conducting the evaluation, 8,504 letters since 1989 have been written and received by CC staff. Appropriate sample size was determined and a percentage of the student population was used to project the entire population's responses in determining student behavior change. Quantitative ranking and criteria identification was used to score student letters based on how effectively TRIS changed students planned behavior. Criteria developed and assigned included 1) Prevented students from using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD), 2) Provoked students to educate/help family members or friends to quitting, 3) Compelled students to educate their peers about the perils of substance abuse, and 4) Influenced students to quit using ATOD themselves. Every letter read was assigned to one of the four criteria. Letters that contained multiple criteria were assigned to the one criterion that was predominately mentioned in the letter.

Post-program Questionnaires

Questionnaires, developed by CC, are distributed to students to complete after participating in the TRIS program. The questionnaire includes questions to students about their use of ATOD and statements students circle that most closely reflects their thoughts after seeing the presentation. See Appendix A for a copy of the student questionnaire. For the purposes of this evaluation, questions regarding seatbelt use, helmet use and safe sex were omitted so to stay focused on the major focus of TRIS, substance abuse prevention.

Results/Findings

Based on letters from students and post-program questionnaires, findings show changes in students' health behaviors as a result of participating in The Real Inside Story program. Findings per each evaluation method are presented below:

Personal Letters from Students

Each student letter was assigned a criteria based on exposure to TRIS program, with one of the following 1) Prevented students from using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD), 2) Provoked students to educate/help family members or friends to quit using, 3) Compelled students to educate their peers about the perils of substance abuse and

ATOD, and 4) Influenced students to quit using ATOD themselves. **Table 1** shows the results of the effectiveness of TRIS for each criterion.

Table 1: Findings from Personal Letters from Students

Criteria	Results/Findings	Sample Student Testimonial
Prevented students from using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD)	One in 5 students or 21% reported they would never use ATOD, they would make better choices in life, their lives were saved or they were inspired to make healthy life choices as a direct result of the TRIS presentation.	<i>“I was inspired to make good decisions and don’t have to be old to die of smoking or taking drugs”.</i>
Provoked students to educate/help family members or friends to quit using	One in 9 students or 8% reported using the knowledge and information learned from TRIS to educate and/or help friends or family members to quit using ATOD	<i>“Thank you for teaching how my grandpa will end up. Do you do private presentations so he can see? Call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX”.</i>
Compelled students to educate their peers about the perils of substance abuse and ATOD	One in 50 students or 2% reported using the knowledge and information learned from TRIS to educate their peers about prevention or quitting.	<i>“I shared the facts with my little brother.” “I couldn’t believe I remembered all of the facts and information shared. I told all of my friends.”</i>
Influenced students to quit using ATOD themselves.	One in 50 students or 2% reported using ATOD stated that after seeing TRIS they would quit using ATOD themselves.	<i>“I didn’t know marijuana is like smoking 7 cigarettes. I thought it was less dangerous. I will never smoke it again.”</i>

Post-program questionnaires

Choice and Consequence has received **706 questionnaires** from students. Content of the questionnaire includes questions to students about their use of ATOD and statements students’ circle that most closely reflects their thoughts after seeing the presentation. (See Appendix A for sample questionnaire). Statements included:

- I plan to quit using (ATOD) today
- I plan to quit using (ATOD) in 6 months

- I have no intention of quitting (ATOD)
- I am going to tell others about the dangers of (ATOD)

Table 2 shows the results of the effectiveness of TRIS from student questionnaires.

Table 2: Findings from Post-program Student Questionnaires.

N=706

	Tobacco	Alcohol	Drugs
Students currently using:	Y= 16% (115) N= 84% (592)	Y= 33% (234) N= 66% (467)	Y= 22% (154) N= 78% (551)
Of those students who currently use, results of the statements most closely reflected students' thoughts after seeing presentation:	A= 31% (36) B= 20% (23) C= 18% (21) D= 19% (22) E*	A= 15% (35) B= 8% (18) C= 85% (98) D= 25% (29) E*	A= 17% (26) B= 16% (24) C= 35% (54) D= 10% (16) E*
Of the students who reported not currently using, results of the statements most closely reflected students' thoughts after seeing presentation:			
A	6% (40)	6% (39)	4% (30)
B	5% (33)	3% (20)	4% (28)
C	4% (26)	14% (105)	8% (57)
D	55% (385)	47% (329)	54% (382)

* Response E was omitted from the evaluation since some of the questionnaires had option/statement E to circle and some did not.

Discussion & Recommendation

TRIS has the most significant impact on students' planned behavior by preventing students from wanting to engage in using harmful substances (ATOD). The most significant impact comes from students pledging in their personal letters to make healthier lifestyle choices and stay away from ATOD. **One in 5** stated they would not use ATOD as a direct result of seeing TRIS.

In the student post-program questionnaires, of the 706 students, **over half** were compelled to tell others and educate their peers about the dangers of ATOD use as a direct result of seeing TRIS. Of the 115 students (or 16%) that currently use tobacco, **over 30%** said they would quit using as a direct result of seeing TRIS.

CC invested in this preliminary evaluation so as to position the information for purposes of program marketing and seeking funding to support the development of an unbiased, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program. This comprehensive program would include a more thorough evaluation of TRIS that measures students' behavior over time and measures students' pre and post knowledge of ATOD.

Additional recommendations to CC that would support TRIS and the development of a monitoring and evaluation program include:

- Hiring an experienced research firm (i.e. Gilmore Research Group, Fred Hutchinson, etc.) that has talented, knowledgeable staff in designing and writing evaluation instruments, like surveys, pre & post-tests, and/or focus groups. It is also recommended that the evaluation plan includes identifying the long-term impact of TRIS by identifying control and intervention groups and program outcomes. The evaluation plan would also include an extensive literature search (using Medline, PubMed and other acclaimed research universities) to locate and compare programs that are similar and have conducted similar program evaluations with positive results and successful outcomes.
- Developing a marketing and public relations strategic plan. The purpose of the plan is for educating public and private foundations, corporations, giving campaigns and corporations; and philanthropic programs so that CC is chosen as their charity organization to fund.

Conclusion

TRIS expanded students' awareness and decision making, resulting in their ability to make critical choices that facilitated changes in their planned health behaviors with relation to ATOD use. Student participation in TRIS empowered youth to make these changes. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan of TRIS must be developed for conducting thorough, unbiased, outcome measures of students' awareness and changes in planned behavior over time as a direct result of TRIS.

References

1. Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Services and Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development and RMC Research Corporation. Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002. www.doh.wa.gov
2. The Monitoring the Future Survey, a continuing study of American youth, conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), at the National Institutes of Health. 2004 www.monitoringthefuture.org

APPENDIX A

TRIS Post-Program Student Questionnaire

Tobacco

1. Do you currently use tobacco products? Yes No

Please circle the statements that most closely reflect your thoughts after seeing the presentation.

- A. I plan to quit using tobacco today.
- B. I plan to quit using tobacco in six months.
- C. I have no intention to quit using tobacco.
- D. I am going to tell others about the dangers of tobacco products.

Alcohol

1. Do you currently use alcohol? Yes No

Please circle the statements that most closely reflect your thoughts after seeing the presentation.

- A. I plan to quit drinking alcohol today.
- B. I plan to quit drinking alcohol in six months.
- C. I have no intention to quit drinking.
- D. I am going to tell others about the dangers of alcohol.

Drugs

1. Do you currently use drugs? Yes No

Please circle the statements that most closely reflect your thoughts after seeing the presentation.

- A. I plan to quit using drugs today.
- B. I plan to quit using drugs in six months.
- C. I have no intention to quit using drugs.
- D. I am going to tell others about the dangers of drugs.