

## **National Runaway Switchboard** ***Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum***

National Runaway Switchboard's *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum* has been evaluated by University-based researchers. Data from this evaluation provide evidence that the *Let's Talk* intervention improves the knowledge and life skills of the youth who participate in the program.

### Developing the *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*

In response to the expressed needs of teachers, social service providers, parents, and community members, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) worked collaboratively with DePaul University's Center for Community and Organization Development (CCOD), youth, and community-based service providers on a three-year process to develop a one-of-a-kind runaway prevention curriculum. This program was developed for flexible delivery since it can be used in its entirety, as individual modules, or to supplement other prevention strategies being taught.

The *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum* is an interactive, 14-module curriculum intended to build life skills, increase knowledge about runaway resources and prevention, educate youth about alternatives to running away, and encourage youth to access and seek help from trusted community members. The program can be delivered by a range of youth-serving professionals, and each module can be completed in 45-60 minutes.

### Evaluating the *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*

In order to evaluate the *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*, all fourteen modules were presented to youth from ten different community sites within eight states, including California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, and Virginia. The sites where the intervention was delivered represented a variety of different community venues ranging from Boys and Girls Clubs to alternative school and juvenile justice programs. Since the goal was to achieve consistency in the samples of youth whose data were included in the evaluation, only the youth that completed at least 50% of the pre- and post-tests that were administered before and after each module were included in the analyses. The sample size after this exclusion was 122, which represents 37% of all youth who participated across all ten sites. Females made up 51.6% of the sample. The adolescents ranged in age from 10 (.8%) to 18 (.8%), with an average age of 13. The sample included youth who had completed sixth grade (10.7%) to those who had completed twelfth grade (6.6%). For most of the participants, ninth grade was the highest grade they had completed (14.8%).

To test whether or not youth were gaining and retaining knowledge that was presented during the intervention, facilitators had the youth complete a survey (pre-test) before each program module was delivered and then again immediately after each program module was completed (post-test). There was a separate survey for each of the 14 modules, each with ten questions pertaining to the information that was to be taught during that lesson. Each test was "graded" to see how many of the questions were answered correctly, and then each student's score on the pre-test was compared to her/his score on the post-test. If students scored higher on the post-test than the pre-test, this indicated that they retained new knowledge following the session. Pre- and post-tests were coded to link both tests while keeping the participants' identification anonymous. Data were entered into SPSS and then analyzed.

### Changes in Knowledge and Life Skills

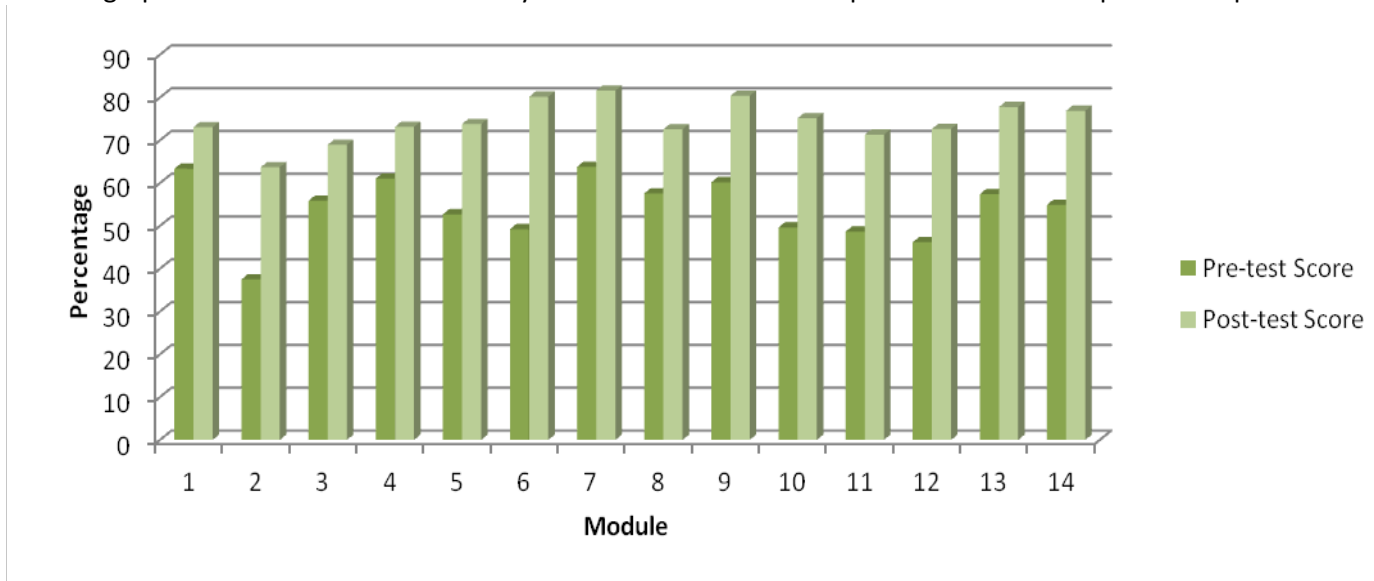
In order to determine if the differences between the two test scores were meaningful and provided evidence that participants truly learned new information and gained new life skills during each session, researchers conducted a statistical test called a "paired samples t-test." This statistical procedure is used when the same group of people completes a survey or test both before and after they participate in an intervention. The paired-samples t-test determines whether there is a significant difference between participants' scores on the pre-test and post-test by computing the difference between the two scores for each participant, and then testing to see if the average difference is significantly different from zero. A separate paired-samples t-test was conducted for each of the 14 modules.

Findings show that information and life skills did indeed increase from the pre-test to the post-test for all of the 14 modules. Scores often improved drastically. For example, in Module 6 (Runaway Reality), the average score for the pre-test across all participants was 49.25% correct, whereas the average score for the post-test across all participants was 80.19%. This means that not only are youth learning, but they are still able to retain what they have learned after the material has been presented. In the table below, the pre- and post-test average percentages (scores) are shown for each module, along with the average increase in test scores.

Module Pre- and Post-Test Average Scores			
Module	Pre-Test Score (Percent Correct)	Post-Test Score (Percent Correct)	Average Increase in Test Score
Communication and Listening	63.37	73.08	9.71
Adolescent Development	37.50	63.70	26.20
Personal Influences	55.89	68.97	13.08
Peers	61.05	73.16	12.11
Families: Roles & Responsibilities	52.72	73.80	21.09
Runaway Reality	49.25	80.19	30.94
National Safe Connections	63.81	81.62	17.81
Community Response & Responsibility	57.60	72.60	15.00
Anger Management	60.20	80.40	20.20
Stress Reduction	49.64	75.18	25.54
Drugs & Alcohol	48.67	71.33	22.67
Sexuality & Sexual Orientation	46.20	72.66	26.46
Internet Safety & Fun	57.44	77.80	20.37
Future Life Planning	54.94	76.91	21.98

\*All values were statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

The bar graph below illustrates that in every module scores showed improvement from the pre- to the post-test.



The National Runaways Switchboard's *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum* is an Evidence-Based Intervention

Data from this evaluation demonstrate that youth are learning helpful information as they participate in the various intervention modules. The average increase in knowledge across modules ranged from 10% to 31%. Of particular note is that the modules which demonstrated the least amount of change were those where participants' initial level of knowledge was relatively high. For example, in Module 1 (Communication and Listening), the average score for the pre-test was 63.37% correct, whereas the average score for the post-test was 73.08%. The modules that evidenced the greatest amount of change from pre- to post-test included: Module 2 (Adolescent Development), Module 6 (Runaway Reality), Module 10 (Stress Reduction), Module 11 (Drugs and Alcohol), and Module 12 (Sexuality and Sexual Orientation). Overall, the evaluation data suggest that this evidence-based prevention program is beneficial to the youth who participate in the modules, both in increasing awareness and knowledge of how to deal with challenging life situations, as well as in reshaping the way youth think about how to overcome these obstacles in a healthy manner.

