

2015 BUCKS COUNTY YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT DRUG & ALCOHOL SURVEY Community Report

In 2015, Voice & Vision, Inc. interviewed 74 youth and young adults (ages 14-26) to hear their first-hand experience regarding their drug and alcohol use and treatment in order to better understand the types of support they need to achieve and maintain their recovery.

This study was conducted in collaboration with the Bucks County Drug & Alcohol Commission, the Bucks County Departments of Mental Health/Developmental Programs & Behavioral Health, and Magellan Behavioral Health. Recommendations were developed in collaboration with the Bucks County Drug & Alcohol Commission, youth and young adults in recovery, and their families, ultimately converging on a holistic treatment approach.

This brief summary of the data is provided to assist families and communities in addressing the challenge of drug use, particularly opiate use, and effective treatment for youth and young adults. According to conservative estimates, every dollar invested in addiction treatment programs can yield savings as high as 12 times the treatment cost due to reduced crime, criminal justice, theft, and healthcare costs.¹

We thank all who made this project possible, especially the youth and young adults who shared their experience, strength, and hope. A detailed report is available by request.



If you or anyone you know needs help, please call:

800-221-6333 — The Council of Southeastern PA Helpline

Available M-F 9-5.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY & FAMILIES

- **Increase** family (or other important person) inclusion in treatment programs and aftercare.
- **Educate** people supporting someone with an addiction on treatment options, signs of relapse, and actions that provide support without enabling addictive behaviors.
- **Explore** ways to provide a broad spectrum of healthy, drug-free, inexpensive, pro-social activities (sports, art, music, nature, etc.) for youth & young adults.
- **Assist** young people in identifying a long-term goal outside of abstinence (such as career) and build supports to help them achieve those goals.
- **Inform** communities, families and young people about 12 Step programs and how to effectively utilize them to support recovery. Identify other supportive options for people who don't find 12 Step Programs helpful.
- **Provide** education to families and the community on recognizing both Drug & Alcohol abuse/addiction and Mental Health disorders, where to go for help, and recovery supports. Assist youth/young adults and their families to connect to these resources.
- **Determine** length of stay in treatment based on individual needs.

What Youth/Young Adults Told Us They Need...

❖ Family or someone important to them to be involved in their treatment and recovery

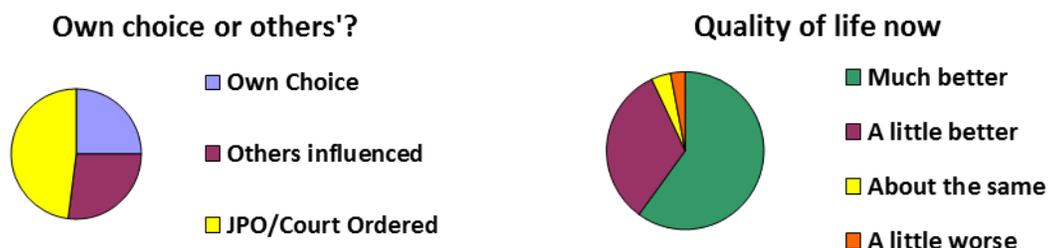
Teens and young adults told us emphatically that family (or someone else close to them) needed to be included in their treatment so that they could heal relationships, build back trust and have someone who could encourage and support them. Young people gave the following reasons for needing involvement of others in treatment and recovery:

- Family/others provide motivation to stay clean.
- People around them need to recognize signs of relapse.
- Families/others need to better understand the challenge of addiction.
- It's traumatic to be separated from family & those close to them; visits & phone calls help.
- Family/others need to learn to support recovery in positive ways and to NOT enable.



❖ Treatment...even when it's not their choice

Only 17 people (1/4) indicated that they were in treatment SOLELY by their own choice. Close to one half said that they were court-ordered or were on probation. Some even said that going to jail was what helped them the most since it made them "get clean". Sixty three (9/10) told us that their life was at least a little better because of their treatment. While the young people we talked with recognized that having someone else make choices for them was what they sometimes needed, they also wanted to be listened to and have their concerns and preferences at least considered.



❖ Sufficient time in rehabilitation and other treatment settings

Three-fourths of the young people we talked with recommended a minimum 30-day rehab stay. However, a few people found 30 days or longer stays repetitive...some even found it traumatic to be away from family for too long. All wanted length of stay to be determined by each individual's circumstances (i.e., drug use, emotional life, physical dependency, prior treatment, etc.) as well as their actual desire to stay clean. Reasons they gave included:

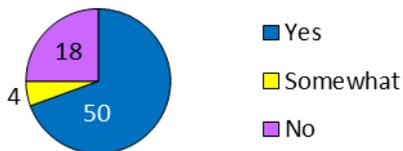
- Body and brain need time to heal
- It takes time to learn the skills necessary to stay clean
- Time is needed to be away from old environments
- Time is needed to observe others in recovery and be able to reflect about self
- Treatment programs needed time to be sure a person isn't "faking" recovery

What Youth/Young Adults Told Us They Need...

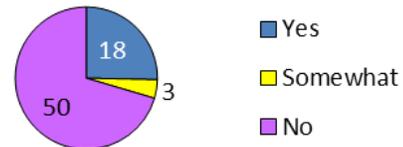
❖ Mental health & physical health needs addressed, both as prevention & to aid recovery

Three-fourths of the young people we talked with had concerns about their mental health. Some reported that mental health symptoms improved once they were drug-free. Others shared reluctance to use psychiatric medications for fear of a new “addiction”. Although we didn’t ask about trauma, many shared stories of trauma with us; for some it was childhood trauma and for others it was trauma resulting from their drug use. One third of those with mental health concerns expressed dissatisfaction with mental health treatment. About one third had concerns about their physical health; many of these concerns involved chronic health conditions or pain.

Q28: Do you have any mental health concerns?
(72 respondents)



Q26: Do you have any physical health concerns?
(71 respondents)



❖ Drug-free options for activities and supports at home & in the community

While 12 Step meetings were helpful, even critical, for most, we heard of some issues with meetings. Many reported attending 12 Step meetings, but only about one fourth had a sponsor. Aside from 12 Step meetings, young people reported very few other drug-free resources in their communities. Many needed help with finding employment. Recreational activities were also a big theme – people reported a need to learn how to have fun without using drugs. When asked about their hopes and dreams for the future, most wanted a family, a good job (not just any job – a career doing something they enjoyed and valued), and sobriety.

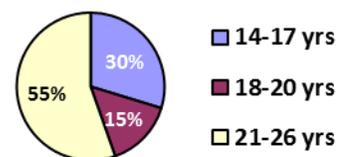
Research has found that a holistic approach works best for Recovery...that is, support is needed for all the aspects of a person’s life, not just their drug use.



Who did we speak with?

We visited seven treatment centers throughout Bucks County as well as the Youth Detention Center and spoke with 74 youth/young adults who volunteered to share their experience with us. The chart shows the ages of the people we interviewed.

Age of those interviewed

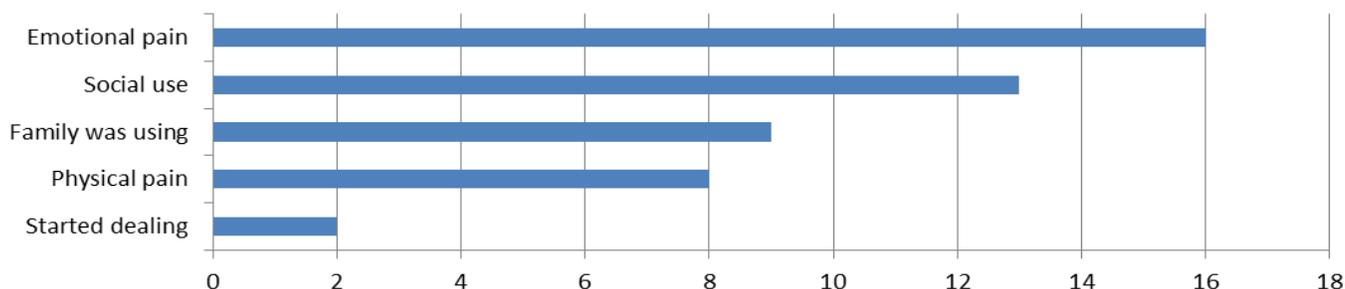


Youth & Young Adults shared some of their history and struggles with us...

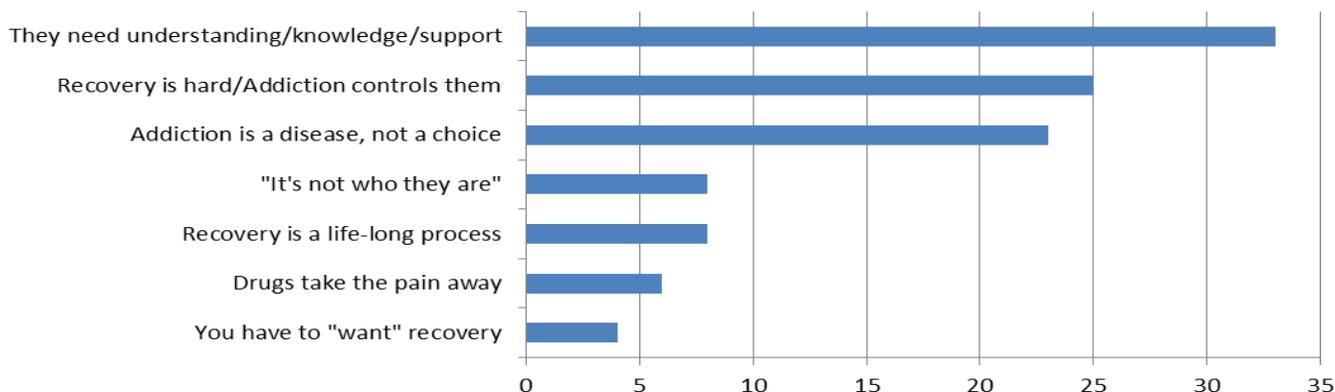
Over three fourths of the 74 young people we spoke with were in treatment for addiction to heroin or other opiates. Over half had been in various treatments more than once, some more than six times.

Over half had begun drug and/or alcohol use by the time they were 13; all but one before the age of 18. Twenty youth/young adults reported having one or more overdose experiences that led to hospitalization -- thirteen overdosed on heroin

Why they began using opiates...



What youth/young adults want people to know about addiction & recovery...



¹Is drug addiction treatment worth its cost? Updated December 2012 from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment-research-based-guide-third-edition/frequently-asked-questions/drug-addiction-treatment-worth-its-cost>

Updated 10-5-16