

IS THE DARKNESS TO LIGHT STEWARDS OF CHILDREN® PROGRAM EVIDENCE BASED?

Does the *Stewards of Children*® training program work? Does it change the way adults care for children? Does it create a shift in societal norms? There is substantial evidence that it does.

Darkness to Light has a long-standing commitment to assessing the effectiveness of the *Stewards of Children*® program. There have been four studies that have evaluated the training program. All studies have demonstrated similar positive results. Training participants have consistently demonstrated increased knowledge, improved attitudes and, most importantly, positive change in child-protective behaviors.

One of these studies was a randomized controlled trial, meeting rigorous standards. This study, conducted by the National Crime Victims Research Center and funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), is considered statistically significant by the academic community.

However, two studies like the one described above are required to meet the highest research standard for evidence-based program effectiveness. Those in academia typically consider a program to be evidence-based only if it has two published randomized controlled trials that measure behavior change over an extended period of time (a year or more).

- The CDC-funded study conducted by the National Crime Victims Research Center was one successful published randomized controlled trial of the *Stewards of Children*® program.
- **Darkness to Light** needs a second published trial of the *Stewards of Children*® training in order to qualify as fully evidence-based in the academic environment.
- It is important that the *Stewards of Children*® program earn the designation of fully evidence-based. Many youth-serving professionals in universities, hospitals and government agencies that require child sexual abuse prevention training are not getting it because there are no programs that have enough scientific data to be categorized as fully evidence-based.

Until **Darkness to Light** is able to conduct a second randomized controlled trial of its *Stewards of Children*® program, it should be designated as a “promising practice,” “evidence-informed,” “backed by evidence,” or “research-based.”

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

DOCUMENTING DARKNESS TO LIGHT'S STEWARDS OF CHILDREN® PROGRAM EFFICACY

Eight studies evaluating **Darkness to Light's** programs and products have been completed.

Evaluation #8: 2017

***Stewards of Children*® Education: Increasing Undergraduate Nursing Student Knowledge of Child Sexual Abuse**

This survey was conducted by L. Elaine Taylor and Heather S. Harris with the Department of Nursing, College of Health Sciences and Professions, University of North Georgia.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation are an increasing public health problem. In spite of the fact that nurses are in a unique position to identify and intervene in the lives of children suffering from abuse due to their role in providing health care in a variety of settings, nursing curricula does not routinely include this focus.

Darkness to Light's *Stewards of Children*® is the only evidence-informed child sexual abuse prevention, recognition, and intervention educator training available nationally.

The goal was to document the effectiveness of the *Stewards of Children*® child sexual abuse training as an effective educational intervention to increase the knowledge level of undergraduate nursing students on how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse and trafficking.

Undergraduate nursing students were required to take the *Stewards of Children* training in their last semester prior to graduation. Students in the study were given a pre-test prior to the class and a post-test following the class. Pre- and post-tests were graded and the results were compared along with an item indicating the participants' perception of the educational intervention in improving their confidence and competence in this area.

This study found a statistically significant increase in the knowledge level of undergraduate nursing students on how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse and trafficking following the *Stewards of Children* training. Students also reported a high level of confidence in how to prevent abuse and react skillfully when child sexual abuse had occurred. The authors concluded that *Stewards of Children* is an effective option to educate nursing students on this topic.

Harris, Heather E, Taylor, L. Elaine. Stewards of Children education: Increasing undergraduate nursing student knowledge of child sexual abuse. Dahlonega, G.A., Department of Nursing, College of Health Sciences and Professions, University of North Georgia. Retrieved from [https://www.nurseeducationtoday.com/article/S0260-6917\(17\)30244-7/fulltext](https://www.nurseeducationtoday.com/article/S0260-6917(17)30244-7/fulltext).

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

Evaluation #7: 2015

The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse Training for Educators on Reporting and Victim Outcomes: The Texas Educator Initiative

This survey was conducted by Catherine Townsend with **Darkness to Light** and M. Lyndon Haviland, MPH, DrPH, of the CUNY School of Public Health

Child sexual abuse recognition and intervention training requirements for educators are rapidly being adopted by states and school districts throughout the nation. There are a plethora of home-grown programs being used to meet these requirements, none of which have data to demonstrate an impact on child-protective behaviors or child sexual abuse reports, substantiations, or interventions.

Darkness to Light's *Stewards of Children*[®] is the only evidence-informed child sexual abuse prevention, recognition, and intervention educator training available nationally. More than one million people, including 250,000 educators, have completed *Stewards of Children*[®]. The training has been shown to change child-protective behaviors but, until now, **Darkness to Light** has not had the data necessary to demonstrate an impact on child sexual abuse reports, substantiations, or interventions in cases of abuse.

In October 2015, **Darkness to Light** conducted a one-year follow-up survey of 79,544 Texas educators who had taken the *Stewards of Children*[®] training, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, during the fall of 2014. The purpose of this survey was to determine if educators increased their reports of previously unrecognized child sexual abuse to authorities in the year after training.

In the year following training, educators increased their reports of child sexual abuse to authorities by 283% as compared with career averaged reports in the year prior to training. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) data was obtained to corroborate the results. An analysis of 2011 – 2015 data from DFPS allow for the possibility of increased reporting of cases of previously unrecognized abuse by educators from 2014 to 2015. More children were also substantiated as sexually abused during this time period.

The effectiveness of a training program such as *Stewards of Children*[®] can be evaluated by whether more children receive intervention services as a result of that program. Intervention services have been shown to mitigate many of the negative effects of child sexual abuse.³⁶ The data allow for the possibility that more children received intervention services in 2014 and 2015 as a result of the Texas Educator Initiative. This implies that the *Stewards of Children*[®] program, alone or in tandem with Texas Mandated Reporter training, may be effective in creating positive outcomes for children.

Townsend, C., Haviland, M. (2016). The impact of child sexual abuse training for educators on reporting and victim outcomes: The Texas Initiative. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from http://www.d2l.org/site/c.4dICIJOkgcISE/b.9358399/k.5FEC/Efficacy_of_Stewards.htm.

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

Evaluation #6: 2014

Initial Assessment of Stewards of Children® Program Effects on Child Sexual Abuse Reporting Rates in Selected South Carolina Counties

This study was conducted by Elizabeth J. Letourneau, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Paul J. Nietert, Ph.D., Department of Public Health Sciences, Medical University of South Carolina and Alyssa A. Rheingold, Ph.D., Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Medical University of South Carolina.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention programs often include a focus on increased reporting of suspected abuse, in addition to other prevention components such as helping trainees recognize suspected abusive situations. This study aimed to determine whether the *Stewards of Children*® prevention program is associated with increased CSA reporting. Analyses examined whether rates of CSA allegations increased over time in three counties in South Carolina (SC) targeted with program dissemination efforts and whether CSA reporting trends differed between the three targeted counties and three comparison counties that did not experience substantial program dissemination. CSA allegation data were obtained by county and year for pre-dissemination and post-dissemination periods from the SC Department of Social Services. Results indicated that, for the targeted counties but not the non-targeted counties, estimated allegation rates increased significantly over time, corresponding with the onset of significant program dissemination efforts. Results also indicated significant between-groups differences in allegation trends for targeted versus non-targeted counties. These findings suggest that the *Stewards of Children*® prevention intervention may be associated with increased CSA allegations.

Letourneau, E. J., Nietert, P. J., Rheingold, A. A. (2016). Brief report: Initial assessment of a prevention program effect on child sexual abuse reporting rates in selected South Carolina counties. Child Maltreatment, 21(1), 74-79.

Evaluation #5: 2006 – 2011

A Controlled Experimental Study of the Impact of Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children® Program on Child Care Professionals' Primary and Secondary Prevention Efforts, including Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Reports of Behavior Over Time, As Related to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse.

This 3-year study was funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and was conducted by Alyssa Rheingold, Ph.D at the National Crime Victim's Research Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. It evaluated, in a randomized, controlled trial, the impact of **Darkness to Light's** *Stewards of Children*® program on childcare professional's primary and secondary prevention efforts, including changes in knowledge, attitudes, and reports of behavior over time, in relation to the prevention of child sexual abuse. This evaluation also compared the different modes of presentation (i.e. via web or facilitator-led). The study determined that those receiving the training (both online and facilitator-led) made significant changes in their child-protective behaviors over the long-term. The study was published in *Prevention Science* in 2015.

Rheingold, A, Zajac, K., Chapman, J., Patton, M., Arellano, M. Saunders, B., Kilpatrick, D. (2015) Child sexual abuse prevention training for childcare professionals: An independent multi-site randomized controlled trial of Stewards of Children. Prevention Science, 16(3) 374-385.

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

Evaluation #4: 2008 – 2009

A Study of the Impact of Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children® Program on S.C. Educators, including Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Reports of Behavior Over Time

This survey of educators taking the *Stewards of Children*® prevention program, instructor-led format, conducted by the Center for Child and Family Studies of the University of South Carolina, was completed in 2009. This evaluation project was funded by a US Department of Health and Human Services. Evaluation methods included a quasi-experimental, counterbalance and matched-question design with multiple data collection points throughout the grant period. Evaluation methods also included quantitative analysis of survey data, as well as qualitative analysis of individual interviews. 830 educators completed a pre-test and post-test. 154 completed a 2-month follow-up. This survey demonstrated that the *Stewards of Children*® curriculum was effective in increasing knowledge, improving attitudes and positively changing adult child-protective behavior.

The Center for Child and Family Studies College of Social Work, University of South Carolina. (2008) A Study of the Impact of Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children Program on S.C. Educators, including Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Reports of Behavior Over Time. Unpublished.

Evaluation #3: 2006-2007

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Darkness to Light's Child Sexual Abuse Online Prevention Training

This quasi-experimental evaluation of the *Stewards of Children*® prevention program, online version, conducted by the Center for Child and Family Studies of the University of South Carolina, was completed in 2007. This study was funded by a grant from the US Department of Commerce Technology Opportunity Program. Employees and volunteers from youth-serving organizations were the test subjects, with an intervention group of 134 individuals and a comparison group of 84 individuals. Evaluation instruments included a pretest, post-test, 2-month post-test and 6-month post-test. This evaluation demonstrated that the *Stewards of Children*® curriculum was effective in increasing knowledge, improving attitudes and positively changing adult child-protective behavior over the long-term.

Derrick, C.M., Flynn, C., Rodi, M., (2011). Benefits and limitations of online child sexual abuse prevention training. Unpublished.

Evaluation #2: 2005

Impact of Stewards of Children® Prevention Curriculum

This study was conducted by Trisha Folds-Bennett, Ph.D. A survey and follow-up survey of adults taking the *Stewards of Children*® training showed that the training increased knowledge and changed participant's child-protective behavior over the long-term. Participants also rated various elements of the training for their impact. This survey showed that participants found the most impact in the following elements: the general information about child sexual abuse; the motivational component of the training; the potential to change attitudes; the importance for youth-serving organizations; and the emotion of the taped interviews integrated into the training.

- 477 evaluations received during the SOC pilot phase - 2005
- Evaluation tool used scale of 1 - 5

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

- Participants representing the 9 pilot partners evaluated the effectiveness of the *Stewards of Children*® curriculum and the efficiency of the training format

The greatest impact was in the following areas:

- Acquisition of new knowledge about child sexual abuse (average = 4.31)
- The ideas of choice, power and consciousness as critical elements (avg = 4.44)
- The potential to change attitudes about child sexual abuse (avg = 4.45) o Critical issues for organizations and individuals concerned about the protection of children (avg = 4.27)
- Perspectives of survivor stories in the videotape (avg = 4.64)
- Perspectives of professionals and parents in videotape (avg = 4.45)

Findings indicate a significant difference in the increase of knowledge and attitudes. Two months after training, participants experience less than a 10% decrease in knowledge gain and attitude change and show an increase in behaviors aimed at the prevention of sexual abuse. Participants were more likely to:

- Discuss issues of sexual abuse with a child or another adult
- Pay attention to potential signs of sexual abuse
- Drop in unexpectedly to ensure that a child is safe in the care of another adult

Bennett, T. F. (2005) Impact of Stewards of Children prevention curriculum. Unpublished.

Evaluation #1: 2003-2005

Primary Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

The study was conducted by Alyssa Rheingold, Ph.D., National Crime Victims Research Center, Medical University of South Carolina. Project consisted of 2 complimentary studies: one quantitative study and one qualitative study. The first evaluated the efficacy of the content and presentation of **Darkness to Light's** media and educational products for changing knowledge, attitudes and preventative behaviors in a community sample. A parallel step in the evaluation of **Darkness to Light's** primary prevention strategies for child abuse, Study 2 was a qualitative investigation examining the attitudes, opinions and suggestions regarding the media and educational products from community members in the forms of focus groups. Experimental conditions included televised public announcements, educational pamphlet, televised public announcement plus education control condition (pamphlet) and no media control. The study included 200 participants Taken together, findings from Studies 1 and 2 indicate that **Darkness to Light's** media campaign may be useful in increasing awareness and knowledge about child sexual abuse (child sexual abuse). Not only was knowledge impacted, but community members viewed the campaign materials as useful products for increasing awareness about this important topic. Findings indicate that a media campaign may serve as a useful first step towards public education so that a forum for prevention could be established in communities. Providing more community outreach in addition to a public media campaign may improve prevention strategies.

Rheingold, A.A., Campbell, C., Self-Brown, S., de Arellano, M., Resnick, H. Kilpatrick, D.G. (2007). Prevention of child sexual abuse: evaluation of a community media campaign; Child Maltreatment 2007 12: 352.

Self-Brown, S., Rheingold, A.A., Campbell, C., de Arellano, M., (2008). A media campaign prevention program for child sexual abuse: community members' perspectives; Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2008, 23: 728