Case Study
Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation: Teen Challenge, Kazakhstan
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Overview

Organization
Teen Challenge Kazakhstan

Project Description
Drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Issues
Addiction, rehabilitation, discipleship, church planting, integral mission

Context

Teen Challenge Kazakhstan (TCK) is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation programme in Almaty, Kazakhstan, operating under the banner of Teen Challenge International. Teen Challenge began in 1959 with the work of David Wilkerson among young people in New York who were involved in drug addiction and criminal gangs. Today there are more than 150 Teen Challenge Centres in 53 countries.

The programme is a biblically-based method of drug and alcohol rehabilitation through which people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, and are discipled and prepared for kingdom service. Teen Challenge sees addiction not as a sickness, but as a crime against God, against oneself, against family and against society. Drug addiction is a deliberate choice made by individuals. Accepting personal responsibility for addiction is essential for change. Addiction destroys a person physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. For rehabilitation to be permanent it must produce positive change in all these areas. Change is gradual as students learn by training and experience to solve life’s problems positively and to live without drugs.

Formally part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan is now part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Seventy percent of the population is Muslim. Poverty in Kazakhstan is primarily a result of the breakdown of the Soviet system. The country has gone from being a welfare state to one with virtually no welfare. Many of the social institutions, such as hospitals, kindergartens, schools and orphanages have closed because what was free now has to be paid for. The population was not equipped to cope with these unexpected changes. Kazakhstan has an official employment rate of less than 20 percent, but probably 70 percent of the population has an income of some kind.

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1 This paper also appears in Justice, Mercy and Humility, ed. Tim Chester, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003)
Drug use is part of the history of Kazakhstan. The opium poppy is grown in the mountains and people have been using opium, in chewable form, for centuries. In more recent times, intravenous use of opium and the use of heroin have become prevalent. It is believed that this form of drug addiction touches 70 percent of all families in Kazakhstan across all economic and educational levels. Alcohol, particularly vodka, is a part of the cultural and social fabric of all the former Soviet states and Gorbachev identified it as the major cause of the collapse of the Soviet industrial machine.

At present drug addiction is seen as a disease. The drug addict is seen as a victim rather than an active decision maker and participant in his or her sin. This attitude is maintained within families – co-dependency is very common. In Kazakhstan addicts remain with their families. As a result addicts put pressure on their families, shifting blame, deceiving and ultimately turning to theft and violence. Many families are forced to sell their homes to clear debts caused by the addict. Some find it difficult to work and many lose their jobs.

**Description**

Initially the main objective of the project was to free people from heroin addiction and to take them through a process of rehabilitation centred in Christian discipleship. Success is not just people freed from narcotic use, but people being trained as disciples of Jesus and serving him in some way.

The project started with a conference to identify the size of the need. TCK then worked with the local church to find programme workers and rent a rehabilitation centre. The 18-month residential training programme of the centre is the core of TCK’s work. The programme is broken into four stages. The first stage (month one) is *detoxification* – the physical withdrawal from drugs. The second stage (months 2-6) is *recovery* from the lifestyle of addiction. Students begin to engage in normal life without drugs or contact with addicted people. A disciplined daily routine of work, study, worship, play and sleep is established within the centre. Stage three (months 7-12) involves *solving life’s problems*. Students learn to cope with daily life through problem-solving and decision-making. At this stage children come to live in the centre with their mothers and contact with family members increases. Stage four (months 13-18) is *re-entry*. Students prepare to leave the program and learn to work for their own personal needs. They take work outside the centre and also accept the extra responsibility of supervising younger students.

The scope of the work of TCK has broadened over time to include a refuge for homeless women, children and those at risk of abuse; recovery programmes for family members; sporting clubs as part of the drug prevention programme; and a full academic school for child addicts, the children of addicts and those at risk.

The programme uses behavioural psychology, but within the framework of Christian discipleship. In looking for behavioural change the Bible is used as the rehabilitation manual. The programme is intensely spiritual. The day starts with prayer and there are five preaching times each day with an emphasis on
developing a personal relationship with God. The programme involves attending a weekly cell group and a local church twice every Sunday. As the students progress through the programme they are encouraged to take part in a church ministry, such as children’s church, choir or youth ministry. All the original workers came from the local church and had a heart to serve God in this ministry.

**Results**

Physical transformation in rehabilitation work can be seen within about eight weeks. The spiritual transformation takes longer as the new believers come to understand their new faith and come to terms with their own sin and personal attitudes. Slower still are the positive effects on the whole family. Families are now required to attend a Family Recovery Programme designed for their healing and development. This helps them understand the nature of their family member’s addiction and the effect it has had on all those associated with him or her. When an addict stops using drugs everything changes within the family. Their lives no revolve around the addict, they are able to seek work and become involved in productive activities again.

The greatest evidence of spiritual transformation has been the planting of churches that are now having their own impact on the community. Eight churches have been planted out of the ministry and seven graduates are fully accredited pastors serving in churches. Many more are faithfully serving as deacons, worship leaders, children’s church leaders and youth group leaders.

At the beginning there was a tremendous hostility from Government departments towards TCK because under the Soviet system the Government provided all the welfare. But God rescued this situation. The fact that TCK has become the largest drug rehabilitation organization in Central Asia and that it is achieving its goals has really led to this transformation. The President has spoken about the programme and now recognizes that not all the social services of the country have to be provided by the Government. The TCK School has obtained its registration and has started issuing the Kazakhstan certificate for school leavers.

TCK continues to face obstacles. The laws of Kazakhstan do not allow anonymity so the police would often break in to arrest people. To stop this barbed wire fences were built around our centres. There have been threats from prosecutors and the KGB. But the reputation of the programme has reduced the number of serious problems. The tax laws are also prohibitive and TCK has to have eleven full-time bookkeepers just to keep up with the bureaucracy of the taxation system.

**Impact**

In the first year TCK worked with a strong church in Almaty and we saw the people in our programme grow and change, get water baptized, baptized in the Holy Spirit and move on in their relationship with God. By the end of the second year the first church – called ‘Freedom’ – was planted. This generated
some disquiet as five of the seven deacons were ex-heroine addicts and all of them contributed to the preaching.

The local Christian community has been powerfully impacted by the incredible miracles God has done in relation to this work. There are no long-term sponsors other than Tearfund UK so God has had to do many miracles just to keep everyone alive. Also, because TCK deals with drug addiction, the discipline is far greater than in a non-residential community so it has been able to organize many things that other churches would be unable to do because the people are more reliable and obedient.

**Evaluation**

When the programme began TCK thought people were so poor they would not be able to contribute any financial support so the programme was totally free. The assumption was that these people were sincere so they were only asked to pay what they could afford. People abused this and would pay absolutely nothing. We realized that people have a different attitude to money as a result of communism. They saw a rich foreign organization that could support them just as the welfare system has done. Families are now means tested and are required to declare all their income and assets.

We have learnt that there will always be people who criticize you – not just from the world, but also from the church. But we cannot allow such criticism to turn us from obedience to God.

On the positive side we have learnt many good points. First, that with God all things are possible and there is always an anointing for work with the poor. Second, you must have strong leadership. The spiritual life of the leader is the most important issue. Third, nothing grows quickly. And finally, if you keep working, God will keep building.

Financing the work and training workers are the greatest challenges. Some of the best workers in other countries are those who have graduated from the programme and this is proving to be the case in Kazakhstan as well. TCK relies on the community for its operational costs. Since we began in 1995 we have operated as a commune, paying small salaries and relying on donations to help feed our students and workers. We have experienced great hardship, but God has kept us. Lack of funds and workers have been overcome by faith, prayer and fasting. Despite these problems the programme has doubled every year since the beginning.