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Mr. Wayne Warner
Dean of Men
Teen Challenge of Arizona

“An Unsecure Border and the Opioid Crisis: The Urgent Need for Action to Save Lives”

My name is Wayne Warner and I am the Dean of Men at the Teen Challenge Christian Life Ranch in New River AZ. Miraculously, I am an ex-opioid addict that has the pleasure of not only testifying today; but also being alive after an extensive period of illicit drug use took me down a path of misery and discontent.

My story begins at 16 years old, when a conflict at school left me with the ring and pinky appendage of my left hand severed after a door was closed on them. I cite this experience not for the trauma nor the pain, but the pain-management I received for my injury. I was a 16 year old, handed narcotics to take when I “needed” them to manage the pain in my hand. I remember this experience vividly and still refer to this as the day I first felt “OK” with myself.

Although I so enjoyed this feeling, the thought of becoming a drug addict truly terrified me to my core; it would take a few years for my addiction to truly take over my life. After a seemingly slow graduation from marijuana, to pills again and then eventually heroin; I found myself homeless, jobless and nearly lifeless. I had been arrested several times, charged with felonies and sent on my way again time after time. I was an angry, injured shell of a human being attempting to carry around the fragmented pieces of my life from rehab to rehab until I could get enough rest to find the energy to do it all over again. Life was meaningless and people were pointless. Love was an idea, abandoned and buried in the cemetery with my relationships with my family and friends. People would die around me and I felt like the lone sailor in the sea; waiting for the shark of addiction to come up and ambush me from beneath; but I wasn't afraid of him. I was afraid that I would have to wake up when the sun rose and the slow and painful torture of withdrawal would begin to set-in once again.

I was arrested for the last time October 28th 2012 after I stole a vehicle from the family member of a friend in order to pick up a bag of heroin with the last \$20 I had to my name. As I spoke through the bars of the back window of the Peoria Police Tahoe I recall giving my mothers' name and number to my friend and asking him to tell her that I was arrested once again, and to just leave me in jail.

Unbeknownst to me, on that very same day, two men from the Christian Life Ranch in New River AZ would knock on the door of a woman's house that desperately needed her son to get help. They gave their testimonies, prayed with her and promised her they would pray for her son to get the help he needed. That woman's name is Tammy and she is my mother.

I was sentenced, I served my time, and I was released. It was ordered that one of the conditions of my probation would be the completion of the Teen Challenge program; it was also made clear to me that in the state of Arizona I would then and always carry the legal label of "felon" indefinitely. Over the following years a few large milestones would be achieved in my life. Teen Challenge and Adult Probation were completed; I committed to and completed an internship at The Ranch and was later hired as a full-time employee.

This might sound like every other redemptive story you've heard, and you might be partially correct. There is one thing that makes me different; that is the fact that I have had my immediate family and my Teen Challenge family behind me every step of the way. They never gave up, never put me down and never stopped loving me. I was baptized, affirmed, counseled and unconditionally loved. I owe a debt of gratitude, not only to both my family and my program; but also to Jesus Christ, my personal Lord and Savior. If it weren't for these relationships being so strong and dependable, I would not be where I am today. My life has now exponentially improved. I get to be part of a team of leaders that is spear-heading the effort to discuss and resolve the real-life issues that people like me have dealt with and some of us have died because of. I'm sought after for guidance, support and even advice. I will be celebrating 6 years of sobriety this October. I will be celebrating my one year anniversary with my wife Kendra this June; and we will be celebrating the birth of our newborn baby boy in July. It's through the program of Teen Challenge, the people that work there and the Grace of God that I am able to speak in front of you today. There is hope for the epidemic our country and our world is currently facing; and that hope is found in love

Thank you and God Bless

Wayne Warner