

# Open Table White Paper



## Summary of the Evidence Base



Open Table, Inc.

7000 N. 16th St., Suite 120-238

Phoenix, AZ 85020

[info@theopentable.org](mailto:info@theopentable.org) | [www.theopentable.org](http://www.theopentable.org)

Open Table Is A 501(C)(3) Non-Profit Organization

# Table of contents

---

Research Report.....	3
Wraparound and Open Table .....	3
The Growing Evidence Base of Open Table.....	3
Evaluations of the Open Table Model Include:.....	3
2013 – RETURN ON INVESTMENT.....	3
2015 – OUTCOME STUDY OF 2013 GRADUATES.....	4
2016 – A STUDY OF ESSENTIAL OPEN TABLE MODEL FEATURES.....	4
2016 – POST OPEN TABLE PARTICIPANT FAITH COMMUNITY SURVEY .....	5
2020 – CASE STUDY FROM BAYLOR UNIVERSITY: SUMMARY.....	6
Open Table Research and Evaluation Team .....	7

# Research Report

---

## **WRAPAROUND AND OPEN TABLE**

Open Table processes draw from the extensive research base of Wraparound, an established evidence-based practice. The steps and procedures for both models are highly similar. Thus, the extensive research base for the Wraparound Process, which comes from 30 years of development and high levels of Federal funding for research, is directly applicable to The Open Table. These studies show that support, when tailored to the individual needs of consumers, with high levels of consumer voice and choice and backed by specific plans to address unmet needs, is effective in addressing complex long term needs central to living in the community, and to movement out of poverty.

## **THE GROWING EVIDENCE BASE OF OPEN TABLE**

Currently, Open Table is considered an evidence-informed practice. As such, it has a formal Theory of Change, replicable training (extensive, on-line), and a range of qualitative studies. New studies, such as the recent (2020) case study done by Baylor University, are underway.

There are literally dozens of national anti-poverty programs. Few have any evidence beyond numbers of jobs and income. Open Table, even as a relatively small non-profit without a formal research budget, is proud of its growing evidence base for the process. Without an extensive research budget, the leadership and Board of Open Table has focused on replicating smaller qualitative studies, following the research principle of the power of data which is confirmed in multiple arenas.

## **Evaluations of the Open Table Model Include:**

---

### **2013 – RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

The City of Phoenix developed a Return on Investment (ROI) model to measure the economic impact of Tables on individuals and families being served. The City calculated that for every dollar spent on training staff and serving families, a 744 percent increase in family financial well-being was realized.

## 2015 – OUTCOME STUDY OF 2013 GRADUATES

Dr. John VanDenBerg, a pioneer of the Wraparound model and consultant to Open Table, developed and implemented a study of outcomes associated with 20 Friends that completed the Table process.

### Key findings include:

- 95% of young adults/families remained in relationship with their Table members
- 85% of the graduates had a better job and/or were in a college or technical school after their Table experiences ended.
- 95% of respondents reported that they were optimistic about their future ability to be self-supported

As with many longitudinal studies, this study was based on interviewing graduates whom could be located (As a training organization, Open Table keeps no formal information on graduates). The data from this study focuses on those who could be located. However, Dr. VanDenBerg also ran the data assuming that all graduates who could not be reached had completely null outcomes. Even with this assumption, which is unlikely, the findings greatly exceeded similar data from studies of other anti-poverty efforts. Please see the Open Table website ([theopentable.org](http://theopentable.org)) for detailed information on this study.

## 2016 – A STUDY OF ESSENTIAL OPEN TABLE MODEL FEATURES

This study, designed by and carried out by researcher Dr. Michael Marks validated the earlier study by VanDenBerg, revealed the importance of Friend and Table member relationship building, the changed views of Table members of people in poverty, and key elements of character building occurring for Table members as core intervention features. In addition, the study showed that the faith of most participants was deepened and the majority of both Table members and Brothers and Sisters were able to develop a shared purpose. 11 Friends and 16 Table members were interviewed for the study. Key findings include:

**Table members bring intellectual and social capital as well as personal experiences.** 63% of Table members noted that they utilized their community and faith connections to help the Friend meet his/her goals; 50% used skills from work or educational training; 44% shared personal experiences. Sharing experiences such as how they coped with their own poverty can be powerful for Friends to witness, and helped build mutuality.

**Friends are receiving intensive individualized supports.** Findings corroborated the intensive and individualized nature of supports and services provided. 85% of participants identified examples of tangible aid/service (e.g., free or no cost auto maintenance; legal assistance) followed closely by examples of emotional social support (e.g., participation in family celebrations, sharing of meals, responding to crises) at 82%. At the same time, many Brothers and Sisters could offer reciprocal support back to Table members – the true basis of relationship.

**Table members change views about poverty.** Table members gained valuable knowledge about the nature of poverty and its consequences. All but one Table member participant told of a change in their preconceived notions of poverty resulting from Table member involvement. This enhanced and more culturally competent view can spread to others in the faith community.

**Table members are transformed.** 12 of the 16 Table members (75%) articulated their own personal transformation including cultivating or enhancing character qualities. For some Table members, their sense of purpose was honed. Other traits noted included building or enhancing feelings of gratitude, increasing patience and compassion, developing curiosity about others and cultivating a sense of awe that people far less advantaged than themselves can thrive, be resilient, and in fact, have something to offer Friends as well as Table members. Table members shared information back and forth with each other, increasing a sense of community for all concerned.

**Table members and Friends are in relationships which endure.** Many Friends and Table members used descriptors such as “family” and “friends”, some noting “lifelong” in describing relationships. 100% of Friends and virtually all Table members noted that they are either in contact or hope to be in contact after the Table ends with most Friends identifying face to face contact.

## 2016 – POST OPEN TABLE PARTICIPANT FAITH COMMUNITY SURVEY

This study, developed with Open Table leadership and delivered by a D.C. area research firm, looked at crucial questions about the effects of Table involvement on participants.

- Most of those surveyed (84%) attended the faith community where the Table was hosted.
- Over 87% of those who participated experience some level of deepening of their faith because of participating on a Table
- Over 75% of Participants felt that the experience of serving on a Table had a large to moderate effect on their understanding of poverty in their community.

- Over 75% of Participants planned to stay in regular contact with the Friend from their Table, and with other Table members.
- Over 75% of participants felt that their organization should expand their Open Table efforts.

The conclusion of the post-open Table Participant Survey was that serving on a Table had a profound experience on most Table members, which validated the conclusion of the separate study of [Essential Open Table Model Features](#) by Dr. Marks.

## **2020 – CASE STUDY FROM BAYLOR UNIVERSITY: SUMMARY**

Youth aging out of foster care, at-risk single moms and homeless veterans achieved significant life transformation through an intensive, volunteer-based, relationship focused model, according to a preliminary study of a limited number of participants in the Open Table program conducted by Baylor University's Program on Prosocial Behavior. Scholars from Baylor University conducted a case study evaluation of the Open Table program in Richmond, Virginia, involving the engagement of six to eight community-based volunteers, each supporting one of 10 individuals with different economic and emotional challenges. Baylor scholars conducted on-site visits, interviewing Open Table staff, community volunteers and the individuals and young families they served.

This case study is published through Baylor's Institute for the Studies of Religion. "The Open Table program trains community-based volunteers to provide relational and social supports through weekly meetings with individuals referred to the program who face a variety of needs and challenges for themselves and their children," said Byron R. Johnson, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Social Sciences and founding director of Baylor's Institute for Studies of Religion. "Beyond a food pantry or a soup kitchen or a clothing closet, this program develops familial relationships, something that is often in scarce supply for these individuals." "What this case study evaluation helped us to discover is a way for individuals with charitable intentions, who are often frustrated with the limits of more episodic, transactional forms of charity that focus on distributing commodities like food and clothing, to give of themselves in a more personal and direct manner," Johnson said. "Open Table has taken this idea and developed an intensive training process to help volunteers seeking this type of charity in areas such as active listening and supporting an individual's need to develop their own life plan."

Open Table is a unique mutual-support model, established in 2005, in which trained volunteers, identified as Table Members, come alongside a family or individuals in need, referred to as a Friend. By giving of themselves relationally, Table Members pour into the lives of Friends. Table Members commit to meeting once a week for a year

with their Friend, providing support by helping them develop and implement their own plan, with the Table Members tapping into their own social networks in support of that plan. This approach has attracted a total of 3,949 volunteer participants through Tables that served 418 individuals and families in 29 states and districts across the United States from 2014-2019.

## Open Table Research and Evaluation Team



**Dr. John VanDenBerg (Team Leader)** has been a volunteer and consultant to Open Table for over eight years. He has a doctorate degree in child psychology. He is one of the original founders of the Wraparound Process, which has served over a million families worldwide, and has many similarities to the Open Table. He is a former State Director of Children’s Mental Health for the States of Kansas and Alaska. He has worked as a consultant in all 50 US states and all provinces in Canada except Nova Scotia, and in countries around the world. He was recently honored for his life’s work with a national award by the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, and was honored in a gathering of 250 US Tribes and Canadian First Nation communities for his work with indigenous peoples.



**Dr. Michael Marks** has over 35 years of experience serving in Executive and Senior Leadership positions with large non-profit organizations; in policy positions in state government and a nonprofit membership organization; as a consultant assisting local county departments and international government entities and most recently, as a senior researcher conducting qualitative and case study research, implementation and fidelity studies for a large research organization. He has special expertise in studying social innovations including developing and evaluating community and faith-based strategies designed to enhance permanency, family connections and social capital for youth transitioning from foster care and youth/adults re-entering community from prison or detention. Dr. Marks is currently supporting Open Table in conducting research studies and developing a system to track and ensure fidelity to essential Open Table practices and strategies.

Contact: We encourage (and love!) questions and comments about this paper. Please send them to Jon Katov at [jonkatov@theopentable.com](mailto:jonkatov@theopentable.com) and Jon will forward them to Team members and writers.