BRIDGING THE GAP

LOVE IS ADVOCACY SURVEY OF RURAL SERVICES REPORT

PRODUCED BY Break the Cycle

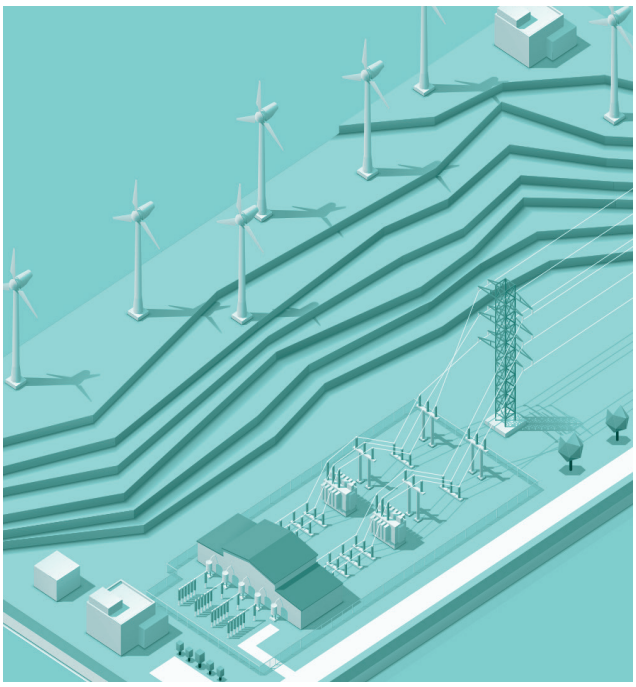
WITH SUPPORT FROM loveisrespect.org

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-TA-AX-K012 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE REPORT

In January 2017, Break the Cycle, in partnership with loveisrespect, the youth-focused project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, distributed a survey to assess the scope of the need for youth-focused services and technical assistance desires in rural communities. Organizations serving rural communities often face a variety of challenges when attempting to serve local populations, with increased barriers that prevent collaborations with rural young people to develop and implement programming and services aimed at ending gender-based violence. The survey is intended for rural youth. The survey is one facet of the larger Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (VAWA) funded technical assistance project, Love is Advocacy: Peer-to-Peer Engagement and Education Models with loveisrespect.



METHODOLOGY

In 2017, loveisrespect and Break the Cycle (BTC) distributed the "Survey of Rural Services" (SRS)[1] to approximately 2,600 direct service organizations across the United States that work to address sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and human trafficking. Anonymous responses were collected from Jan. 25 until March 2, 2017, from organizations that work within rural communities.

The analysis of the SRS includes a mixed-methodological approach. Multiple choice questions were analyzed quantitatively, and responses to open-ended questions were coded and analyzed qualitatively. Four hundred twenty-four (424) individuals completed the SRS. Three responses were excluded from the analysis because they were not rural-serving organizations,[2] resulting in a total sample size of 421 respondents.

For some questions, respondents were able to select multiple answers. If more than one survey was completed from identical IP addresses, duplicate responses were only counted once. This process allowed for individual responses to be captured in the analysis without increasing the total number of responding organizations.

DEFINITIONS

Rural-serving: Organizations that provide services in rural communities.

Young People: Defined by survey respondents and can mean children, adolescents, teenagers, or young adults.

Respondent: An individual that responded to a survey question.

LIMITATIONS

Definitions were not provided within the survey tool; therefore, respondents relied on self-identification for their survey responses. The self-identification process acts as a limitation of the survey findings. Respondent definitions of a rural-serving organization may not align with the Census definition of "rural." Additionally, respondent definitions of "young people" may vary.

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents[3] did not respond to questions about youth engagement strategies currently practiced or desired to practice. This portion of the survey, while informative, leaves out 20 percent of the sample size and may be difficult to make clear inferences.

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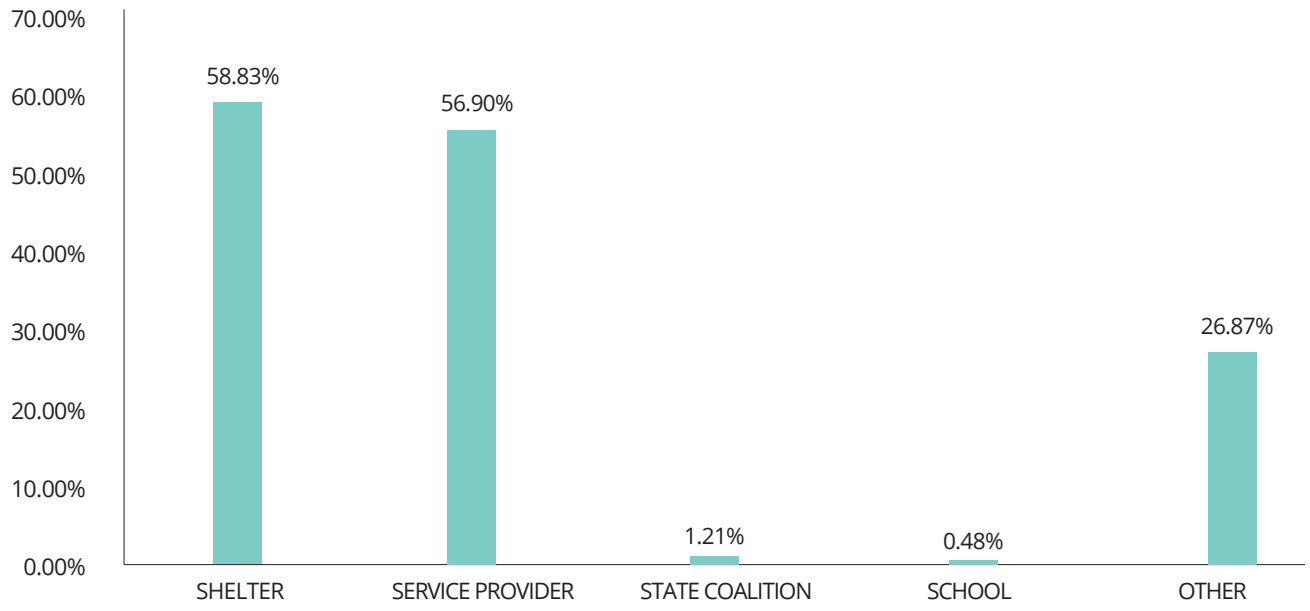
[1] Questions listed in Appendix A.
[2] One of the non-rural serving organizations self—identified as a funding agency.
[3] 19.23% of respondents

DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents were asked to identify themselves based on agency type and could select multiple answers. Of the 413 respondents, more than half identified their work space as a shelter[4] and/or identified as a service provider.[5] The remaining respondents identified as state coalitions,[6] schools,[7] or other non-profit/community based organizations (NPO/CBO).[8] Organizations that identified as "Other NPO/CBO", represented a variety of issue specific, population specific and service specific organizations.

SURVEY SAMPLE



Of the 117 respondents that identified as "Other NPO/CBO," 42.74% (n=50) also identified as a shelter and 50.43% (n=59) also identified as a service provider. Additionally, two of the five state coalitions, and both schools also identified as "Other NPO/CBO."

[4] 57.71% of respondents
[5] 55.81% of respondents
[6] 1.18% of respondents
[7] 0.47% of respondents
[8] 26.36% of respondents

RESULTS AND TAKE-AWAYS

ORGANIZATIONS BELIEVE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE FUTURE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

> "[Young people] are the pulse in many communities. They have new ideas and know how to reach other youth while making an impact on adults.

> "[Young people] understand the challenges of rural living and the importance of safety plans that need to be specific to rural victims/families.

> "Young people are our future and they know the pulse of the community for their generation. It's very helpful for service delivery, marketing and again gaining that trust.

> "Youth or young people need to feel a connection to their communities. They have an insight that older people do not have. They are the leaders of tomorrow.

SERVICES FOR RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LIMITED

Respondents were asked to identify the services they provide to both general and youth specific populations within rural communities including dating abuse advocacy, engaging men and boys programming, prevention education programming, domestic violence advocacy, stalking advocacy, sexual assault advocacy, housing/shelter, group counseling, individual counseling and legal services.

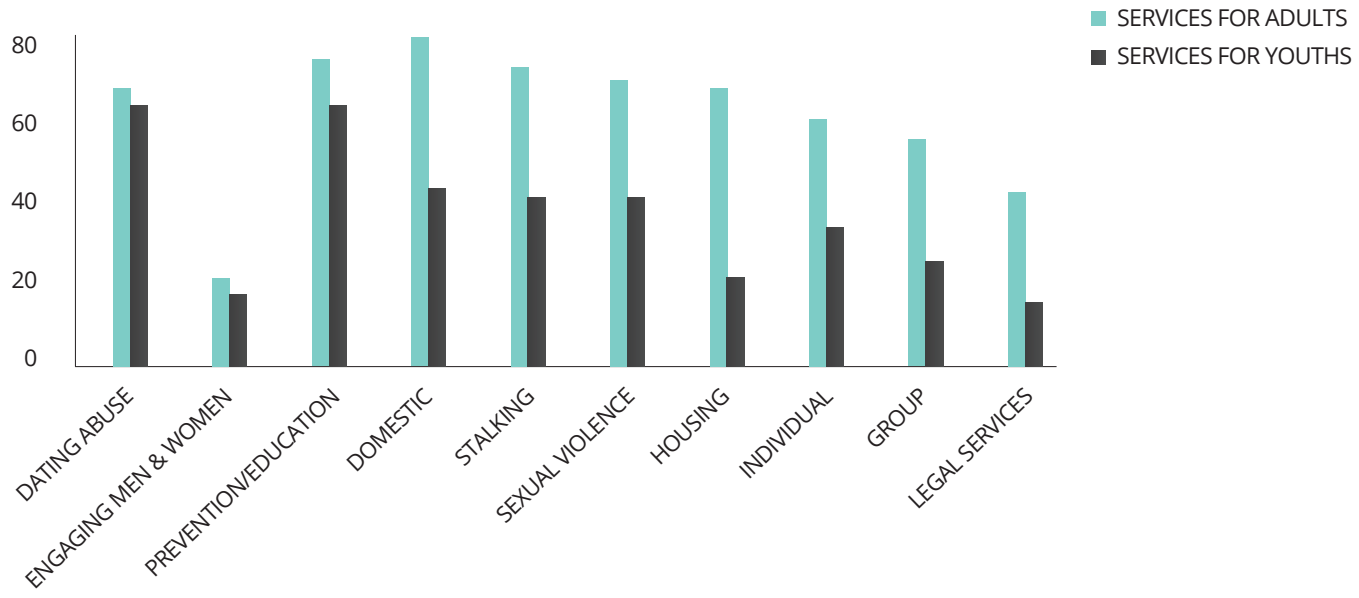
Service provision among rural communities targeting young people is varied across respondents. The rate of dating abuse advocacy, engaging men and boys programming, and prevention/education programming is offered at similar rates for adults and young people. However, additional services for young people are severely lacking.

Although more than 78 percent of respondents offer domestic violence advocacy services, less than 45 percent offer these services to young people. Similar gaps exist among stalking and sexual violence advocacy services. The largest gaps in service provision targeting youth clientele exist among shelter or housing services, individual counseling, group counseling and legal services. Less than 1 in 5 respondents offer legal services [9] and/or engaging men and boys programming [10] to young people. Similarly, less than 1 in 4 respondents offer shelter/housing services [11] and/or group counseling [12] for young people.

The largest gaps in service provision targeting youth clientele exist among shelter or housing services, individual counseling, group counseling, and legal services.

More than 1 in 10 respondents [13] did not report providing any of the listed services focused on young people. This finding may suggest that some of these organizations or providers do not offer any of the listed services to young people, or that they do not specialize in providing any of these services to young people, primarily.

SERVICES OFFERED IN RURUAL COMMUNITES



[9] 17.10% offer legal services focused on young people
[11] 16.62% offer engaging men and boys programming focused on young people
[12] 20.19% offer shelter/housing services focused on young people
[13] 24.22% offer group counseling focused on young people

OVERCOMING BARRIERS USING CREATIVE ENTRY POINTS IS ESSENTIAL TO REACHING RURAL CLIENTS

There are many unique barriers to serving rural communities. According to respondents, the most commonly identified challenge for rural communities when attempting to access services is limited access to transportation options.[14] This barrier increases in severity across programs offering services focused on young people, which noted this challenge 94.71 percent of the time or more.

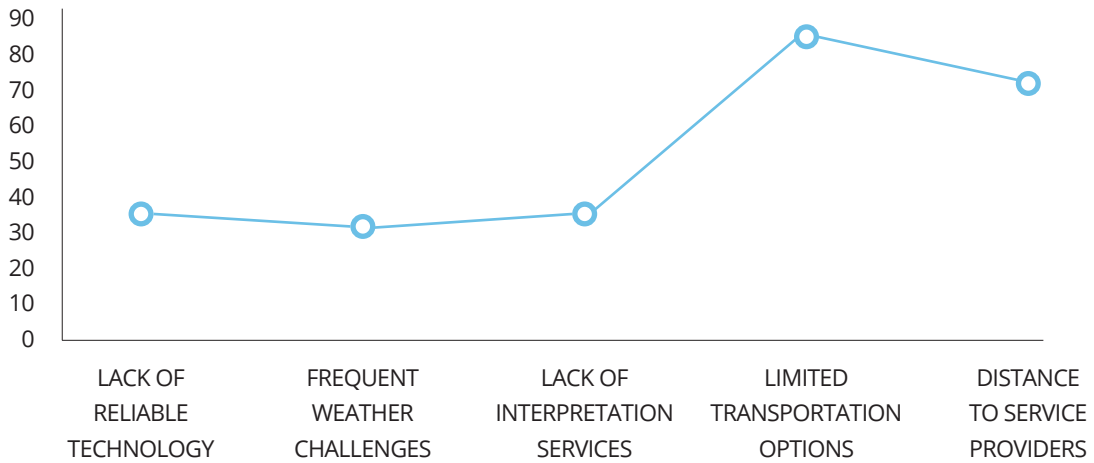
> "I find that driving to or meeting the survivor in their chosen environment works best instead of having them come find us.

The second most frequently cited challenge to accessing services among youth serving programs is the distance between service providers and the community. In fact, nearly three in four responding organizations identify distance as a barrier to service provision, compounding transportation barriers. [15]

Local weather challenges can also inhibit transportation to local organizations. Nearly 1 in 3[16] respondents assert that frequent weather related challenges serve as a barrier to clients receiving services

Strategies employed to address transportation and distance barriers include establishing home or satellite offices in the service community and offering flexible service or meeting locations. One respondent reported, "I find that driving to or meeting the survivor in their chosen environment works best instead of having them come find us."

SERVICES OFFERED IN RURUAL COMMUNITES



[14] 84.79% of respondents
[15] 71.49% of youth-serving respondents
[16] 31.59% respondents

Other barriers that impact a client's ability to access program services include clients' limited income, unstable housing or seasonal employment. In response, organizations strive to meet individual needs, offering gas cards, transportation assistance or incentives like food or childcare.

Technology and communication were also highlighted as challenging arenas. More than one in three respondents noted the lack of reliable technology, such as Internet service, as a barrier to accessing services.[17] This number is similar to the number of respondents who cited lacking interpretation services as a challenge.[18] Few responding organizations noted strategies for overcoming technological barriers beyond onsite outreach and services, and a minimal number mentioned intentionally hiring multilingual staff.

Respondents also noted poverty and limited resources, as additional barriers to providing services in rural communities. Shared solution strategies include, "having a strong knowledge of that community's culture, history, economy, and resources," and the ability to "communicate the mission in a variety of dialects-[Republican, Democrat, conservative, progressive, older, millennial]."

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND FOSTERING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY ARE ESSENTIAL TO REACHING RURAL CLIENTS

Organizations report working with local stakeholders, learning about local community culture(s) and challenges, and utilizing community-based approaches in order to develop programming and services that promote connectivity and are centered in the expertise of locals. Some respondents report providing training to community partners such as medical professionals, task force members, Department of Social Services and Child Protective Services as a method of building community connectivity.

Respondents note that building trust with local communities is particularly important. One reported method of building trust is having a consistent presence in rural service areas and partnering with community members such as social service organizations, schools, law enforcement and faith-based communities. Additionally, respondents seek community input on needs and services, engage in networking opportunities, provide a variety of community outreach efforts, and build and maintain community collaborations as methods for establishing ongoing trust. Employing local community members as project staff can also be a helpful strategy.

> "The positive impact of outreach efforts relies heavily on the quality of the relationship established between the service provider and its audience. Spending time building relationships within communities is essential!

HOW ARE ORGANIZATIONS CONDUCTING OUTREACH?

- Community Collaborations & Networking
- Flexible Meeting Times
- Giveaways
- Radio
- Word of Mouth
- Local Trainings & Presentations
- Community Events
- Face-to-Face Communication

[17] 36.81% respondents
[18] 31.05% of respondents

ORGANIZATIONS BELIEVE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO WORK WITH THEIR PEERS, AND ADVANCE THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

> "They are the ones who can reach other youth most effectively. The best way to utilize prevention methods is through youth and by youth.

> "Young people know so much about technology and social media. It is important to know the trends and get first-hand stories from youth on what works to keep youth involved.

> "Because with input from the youth, programs are more likely to be relevant and be more successful in reaching them/peers with a greater success in changing social norms.

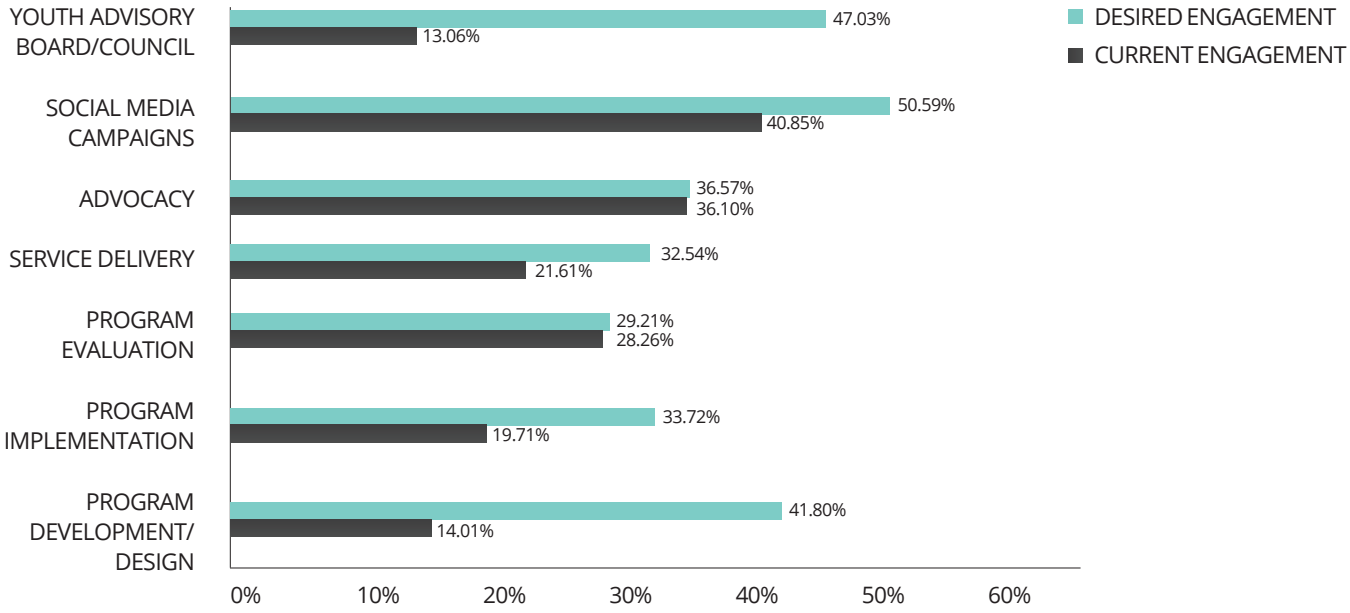
> "Youth reach out to other youth before they'd ever reach out to adults. In rural communities, where it's difficult for even adults to reach out to service providers, that makes it even more unlikely that youth will do so. We need to engage them in the solution.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMMING IS LIMITED, BUT ORGANIZATIONS ARE INTERESTED IN GROWING THEIR CAPACITY TO COLLABORATE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Overall, respondents report wanting to implement more youth engagement strategies than they currently practice. Collaborating with rural young people through social media campaigns was the most frequently reported engagement strategy currently practiced, though further work is desired in this arena. Programs also appear to be practicing advocacy and program evaluation strategies with youth participants at desireable rates, and may not need additional support in implementing these particular strategies.

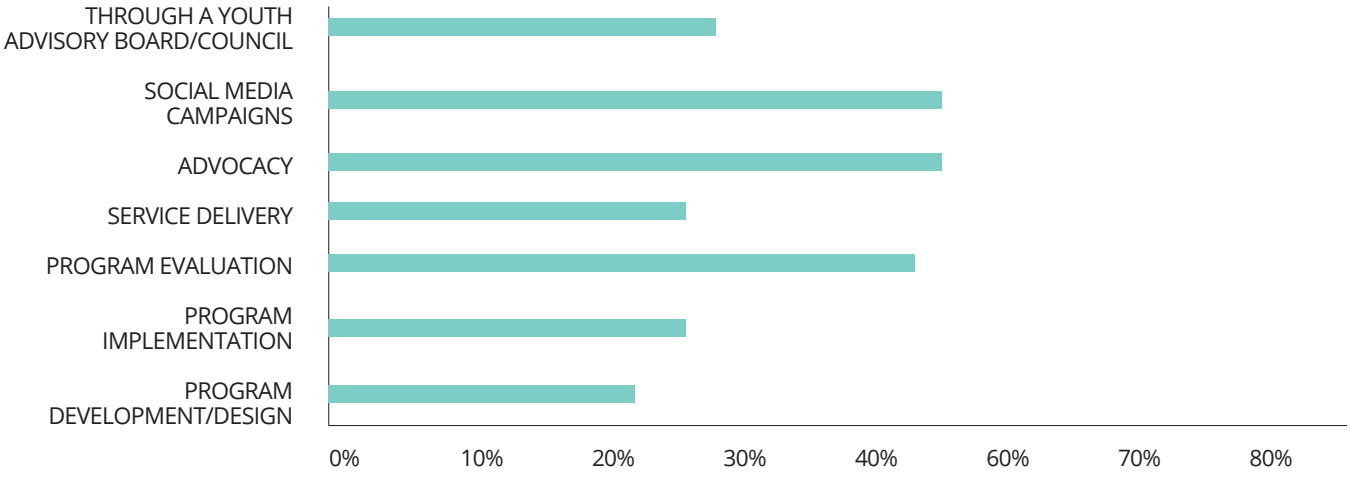
> "Youth advocates are able to talk with us about how to best provide resources, how to engage youth and how to ensure that youth voices are heard.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN RURUAL ORGANIZATIONS



In addition to social media campaigns, the next two most frequently desired youth engagement strategies to implement involve youth advisory board/councils and engaging youth in program development/design. These are also the two engagement strategies where respondents experienced the highest disparity between their current practices and where they'd like to be. Even among youth serving organizations, youth advisory board/councils are the least likely method used to engage young people. This indicates a potential focus area for follow up support with rural programs.

CURRENT (AVERAGE) RATE OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT BY PROGRAM OR SERVICE TYPE, YOUTH-SERVING RESPONDENTS



Youth-serving respondents are more likely to have current youth-engagement practices and are interested in growing these efforts. Only one in seven overall respondents have involved young people in the development or design of their programming, yet nearly three times as many are interested. The disparity exists even when looking at programs who specifically offer services to youth. Within the same group of respondents, 26 percent report involving young people in program implementation, and nearly half have involved young people in program evaluation. It's not surprising that among overall respondents, fewer levels of existing youth engagement practices on program implementation and evaluation exist. Nonetheless, programs are still interested in growing these efforts.

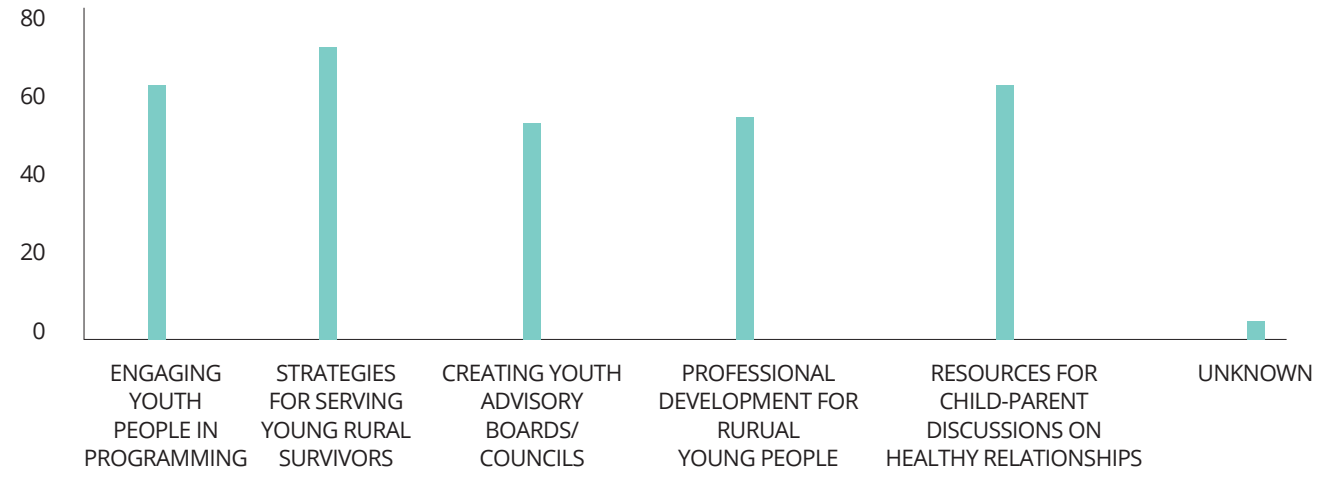
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TRENDS VARY DEPENDING ON THE PROGRAM SERVICES OFFERED

Though youth-serving respondents programs did not utilize youth advisory boards/councils frequently these respondents are three times more likely to involve young people in social media campaigns, and more than twice as likely to involve them in advocacy or program evaluation.

Counseling programs, advocacy programs, legal service programs, shelters, and prevention/education programs most frequently report involving young people through program evaluation, advocacy, and social media campaigns. Engaging men and boys programs report similarly high rates of utilizing these methods, in addition to collaborating with young people through program implementation. Organizations offering engaging men and boys programming are more likely to involve young people in their social media campaigns than any other program type, while individual counseling programs are the least likely to use social media campaigns as a method to work alongside young people.

When asked how youth-serving programs would like to further involve young people in their programming, engaging men and boys programs are on average, most interested, [19] and legal service programs are the least interested. [20] This may be indicative of a need for clarity on how young people can collaborate in the design provision, and evaluation of legal services.

SERVICES OFFERED IN RURUAL COMMUNITES



[19] 50% of youth-serving respondents offering engaging men and boys programming
[20] 38% of youth-serving respondents offering legal services

Overall, responding organizations have the most interest in receiving information on strategies for serving young rural survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating abuse,[21] though interest is high among all categories. Respondents were least interested in information related to creating youth advisory boards/councils. [22] These findings could suggest multiple realities, including a lack of capacity or interest in developing a new group to advise the work.

YOUTH VOICES AND LEADERSHIP ARE ESSENTIAL TO SUSTAINING THE MOVEMENT TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND CREATING CULTURAL CHANGE

> "Young people make up a significant portion of the clients we provide all services to and, as generations rising in leadership, they will shape what services look like and how they are provided in the future.

> "Youth are clients just as much as adults are, and their opinions and needs are equally valuable.

> "Young people can help change society. The more youth advocates we have the more young people we can help. Young people will not always disclose their abuse to adults. A lot of times, it's easier to talk to another friend that's your age and disclose information. The more youth we can help in this manner, the more society becomes less abusive as a whole.

> "Involved young people can be the initial charge that sparks a movement.

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents [23] did not respond if young people were a part of any of the activities listed in the survey. Notably, even fewer respondents reported having engaged young people through a youth-advisory board or council. [24] Although there is a low current rate of collaboration with young people by respondents through youth advisory boards or councils, the high levels of interest in future collaboration through these methods is promising.

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[21] 72.44% of respondents
[22] 51.78% of respondents
[23] 19.23% of respondents
[24] 13.06% or respondents

High levels of both current collaboration [25] and interest in future collaborations [26] with young people on social media campaigns are a positive step toward advancing youth leadership but may also speak to a need for further professional development in this area. In many cases, organizations may be relying on young people to direct, manage, and conceptualize social media programming due to staff's lack of skills in this area. While engaging young people in online programming is a strategic method for centering youth expertise and collaborating on program implementation, this efforts must not be at the expense of staff capacity building through cross training. Similarly, creating space for young people's leadership through social media programming should not be viewed as meeting a requirement for youth inclusion. Rather, organizations should strive to regularly and intentionally assess when, where, and how young people are being centered as leaders in the move to end violence, within organizational programming and services.

When asked how youth-serving programs would like to further involve young people in their programming, engaging men and boys programs were on average, most likely to indicate any interest [27] while legal service programs were the least interested in collaborating with young people. [28] This level of interest may be indicative of a need for clarity in the ways in which young people can collaborate in the design, provision and evaluation of legal services.

Continued collaborations with young people across programming and services is essential, however, centering youth as leaders in these efforts must not be at the expense of advancing the skills of current program and organizational staff. Creating avenues for reciprocal training and development, with staff building the capacity of youth leaders, and young people advancing the knowledge and skill sets of program staff is a vital component of sustainable collaborations and efforts toward ending violence.

[25] 40.85% of respondents
[26] 50.59% of respondents
[27] 50% of youth-serving respondents, on average
[28] 38% of youth-serving respondents, on average

CONCLUSION

Youth Collaboration: The findings from this survey underscore the importance of building organizational capacity to effectively collaborate alongside young people in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programming and services in rural communities. To best serve young people in both violence prevention and response, they must play a key role in the conceptualization and actualization of services and programming. Although respondents reported a variety of services made available to young people in rural communities, programs and services are still severely lacking. Survey findings also highlight that while some services and programs may currently be offered to rural young people, many of these services are not designed or conducted through a youth-centered or youth-led framework.

Program and Services: While in many regards, programs and services are offered to young people at a low rate overall, the lack of available services become particularly more troubling when compared to the rate of services offered to adults in rural communities. Despite the fact that within rural-serving organizations, dating abuse advocacy, engaging men and boys programming, and prevention/education programming is offered at similar rates for both adults and young people, gaps for stalking advocacy and sexual violence advocacy are evident. This reality may be due to rural serving organizations grouping domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking advocacy services under the umbrella of dating violence advocacy. Further inquiry should be made to assess if the results of this survey indicate the existence of grouped services or lacking services. If grouped services are the current reality among rural-serving organizations, assessments should be made to determine if these advocacy services are comprehensively inclusive of all domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, and dating abuse when put into practice.

Transportation: As the most commonly identified challenge to accessing services in rural communities, the limited access to transportation options is experienced at an even greater rate across programs offering services focused on young people. In the age of social media, technology has the potential to serve as a bridge in reaching difficult to access communities. Despite this reality, however, the barriers of limited reliable technology access may act as a hindrance to fully actualizing this solution. Further research into what strategic methods can be used at a community level to reach young people in an effort to provide services, may prove fruitful.

Filling the Gaps: This survey contributes to the existing body of work exploring available prevention and response services across the United States, further highlighting the importance of understanding the existing limitations to accessing services within rural and frontier communities. The current project's mixed-methodology allowed for respondents to provide insights into existing gaps of service availability for both young people and adults, while simultaneously outlining the unique challenges and corresponding solutions practitioners are observing in their service areas. While many respondents have yet to fully engage young people as collaborators across program development, implementation, and evaluation, the survey findings iterate that practitioners are open to initiating and enhancing their current collaborations with young people. Further inquiry into the reasoning behind practitioners' willingness and capacity to collaborate alongside young people will assist in better crafting approaches to equip rural and frontier organizations in supporting young people to end abuse and build healthy relationships.

APPENDIX A

"NATIONAL SURVEY OF RURAL SERVICES" QUESTION LIST:

QUESTION 1

Please select what type of agency you represent (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 2

What services, if any, do you offer to rural communities? (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 3

What, if any, of your services for rural communities, are focused on young people? (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 4

What strategies do you find most useful when conducting outreach to rural communities?

QUESTION 5

What challenges exist for rural communities when attempting to access services in your area? (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 6

In what ways has your organization involved rural young people in your programming/ services? (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 7

Why do you think it's important to involve young people in serving rural communities?

QUESTION 8

Are there other ways that you would like to involve young people in your rural programming and services? (choose all that apply).

QUESTION 9

In which of the following topics of serving rural communities (if any) would your organization want to receive more information on? (choose all that apply).

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