



PIEDMONT TRIAD
REGIONAL COUNCIL



YOUTH FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

SUMMARY

During October 2022, Piedmont Triad Regional Council (PTRC), Surry County Office of Substance Abuse Recovery (SCOSAR) and its partners conducted seven focus groups with 56 youth during October 2022. Youth shared their perspectives on mental and physical health needs in their communities, as well as recommendations for future improvements. Participants quotes are incorporated throughout.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

AGE :

The focus groups included participants as young as 11 years old. Most participants were between 12-15 years old.

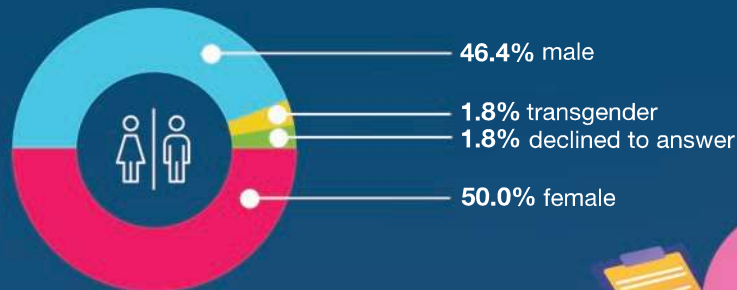
RACE/ETHNICITY:

Most participants identified as White/Caucasian, followed by Multi-Racial, then Black/African American, and Asian American. Some participants declined to note their race.

Most participants identified as non-Hispanic or not a member of the Latin Community. About a quarter of participants identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, about a tenth of participants did not know their ethnicity, and about 10% declined to answer this question.

GENDER:

50% of participants identified as female, while 46.4% said male, 1.8% said transgender, and 1.8% declined to answer.



COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

Participants noted that mental health seemed to be good within their communities; however, people could be facing issues privately. Visibility of mental health concerns within the community should be addressed more frequently.

" I feel like mostly people here are happy, but then again people try to hide it and you don't always know ...what they're feeling like outside of public spaces. "

" I feel like most of my peers feel pretty good, but I know that they all struggle sometimes with their own problems and can feel sad at times. "

Older participants described higher levels of community mental health problems (especially depression and anxiety) and this theme was also validated through discussions.



...the older you get, the more you understand; the more you understand, the more stress.



Focus group participants also spoke about risky behaviors of youth. Younger participants mentioned the prevalence of vaping, smoking, drinking, and use of other drugs, as well as reckless driving. Older participants mentioned alcohol consumption, smoking marijuana, drug use, and vaping.



When you get older, ... you try to be more cool...and you make more bad decisions and start vaping. Some people might start drinking, others are partying, taking pills or drugs.

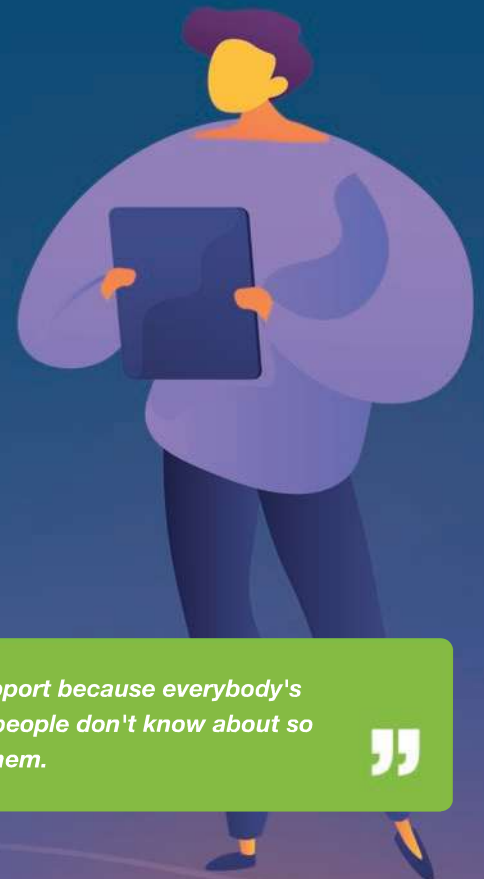


HIGHLIGHTS ON MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:

Participants mentioned that struggles among parents, stress, and loneliness were contributors to mental health problems among youth. Ways to ameliorate school stress were also identified: lower adults' expectations/emphasis on good grades, teachers should "listen more" and improve relationships with students, more recreational activities, therapy, and utilization of mental health days.



Most kids need extra emotional support because everybody's got something going on that most people don't know about so that extra support can really help them.



HIGHLIGHTS OF SPECIFIC PROGRAMS/RESOURCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE WITHIN SURRY COUNTY:

Emphasis was placed on specific programs and resources currently available within the community to support mental health. Among the answers that participants gave were availability of sports, recreational activities, parks, community centers, therapy places, and areas where they can be themselves without fear of judgement.



I think anything that you can get for a cheap price that's not hard to get to...Like Starlight Skate Center. It's a good place... it's a fun time. You can go and meet new friends.

I know for me personally volunteering is a big way to just help with my mental health ... just helping others ... gives you a positive feeling.



Participants also spoke about what they felt was needed within their community. A theme commonly mentioned was to increase the availability of therapists/counselors in the local area and schools, emotional support groups, and youth/peer groups. We also saw endorsement of time management classes, tutoring, and art schools/groups.



I think a lot of students don't take advantage of all the opportunities...in the community because they may see they don't fit in or they just don't wanna put in the effort.

HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNING SUPPORT OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:



The dismissal of mental health problems by parents, the minimization of children's stress, the need for adults to help youth find mental health services they may need, and the discreet handling of bullying issues was mentioned.



“ Some people...might seem fine, but they're going through something. So I feel like if they were...to check up on them every now and then, I feel like it would help. ”

“ Parents can be very strict...they don't realize how stressful school can really be. So I would recommend for them to start listening to their kids more instead of...brushing it off all the time ”

COMMUNITY PHYSICAL HEALTH

Younger students described community physical health as good or average. They highlighted the contrast between people who have been educated about health and fitness and those who have not. Participants also noted that technology/smartphones and the pandemic have caused a decline in physical activity, while information on the internet cannot always be trusted to provide accurate fitness information.



“ I don't think the eating's great, but the activity is pretty good to make up. ”

“ I think after the pandemic there's been a huge decline in... physical health...right now the only ones who are trying to stay in shape [are] athletes...”

HIGHLIGHTS OF PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:

Participants spoke about physical health needs within the community. More health and nutrition classes with updated information, increased availability and affordability of healthy food, and support for children who may struggle with sports were mentioned.



“ *I feel like most people are pretty good about exercising and stuff but even the best athletes don't eat good at all...And I feel like we need more like education on how to eat healthy and also better choices to eat.* ”

“ *Just having more programs in the school that could teach kids the basics... hand eye coordination and things like that so people aren't being left behind...maybe making P.E. a little more diverse...* ”



HIGHLIGHTS OF SPECIFIC PROGRAMS / RESOURCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:

Programs and resources in the community that support the physical health of youth were mentioned. The availability of gyms, parks, doctors, and pharmacies was mentioned (Reeves Community Center, Star Light Skate Center; Planet Fitness, Fisher River, Armfield Center). Some barriers to accessing these programs and resources were also stated—expenses, transportation, age restrictions for some resources/programs, and privacy concerns.



“ *I play softball here and travel ball ... so I know a lot of the resources of places...but they are so expensive...*

”

Participants also discussed necessary improvements to be implemented: affordable fitness center/facilities, field trips that incorporate physical activity, open weight room/gym, parks with basketball courts for older youth, expanded parks with basketball courts for older youth, community transportation to access places, increased accessibility for people in wheelchairs, and community gardens / affordable grocery stores were mentioned.

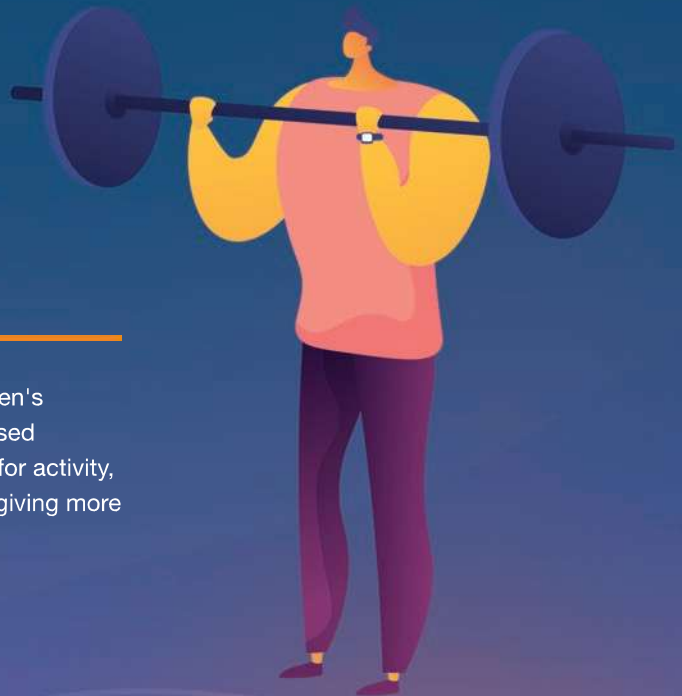


“ *A lot of kids ... they want to like play either soccer or basketball, but they're not allowed...either the goals are locked... they're not in the sport and it messes with a lot of kids...sport is their passion, but they may not be part of the team.*

”

HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNING HOW ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY CAN BETTER SUPPORT YOUTH PHYSICAL HEALTH:

Themes seen within this discussion included adult encouragement for children's participation in physical activity, providing transportation to activities, increased supervision of sporting events, fundraisers to expand parks & opportunities for activity, availability of healthier school food, mentorship programs for students, and giving more personalized attention to students.





Just engage the whole family in activities so that way it can be a good bonding experience and you'll be getting healthy at the same time.



OVERALL, WHILE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS SPOKE ABOUT THE NEEDS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES REGARDING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, THEY ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE POSITIVE ASPECTS SUCH AS SKATING CENTERS, THERAPISTS, PARKS, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THEIR OVERALL WELL-BEING.

