

# CommUnity Conversations

## Youth-Serving Organizations

April 14th, 2020

This event was the first in a series of virtual conversations bringing together service organizations and supporters from around Wisconsin to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on their work. Twenty-three professionals from youth-serving organizations were in attendance. The conversation focused on adapting to remote service, meeting new needs for support, and program sustainability.

### Adapting to COVID-19

Youth-serving organizations in Wisconsin are facing an interruption of in-person services, programs, and events through the summer. Providers are looking for ways to engage with youth remotely, and often, this means going online. Since many school districts have sent students home with laptops, organizations and the youth they serve are also better positioned to make the switch to online programming.

But access to online services is not happening for all youth. Many rural areas and low-income households continue to lack reliable, adequate internet. Further, providers need new tools and strategies to keep youth engaged without face-to-face services. Otherwise, they fear youth may fall off the radar.

### Emerging Community Needs

Providers report an increased need for mental health and educational resources, in light of disruptions related to the COVID-19 crisis. Though program adaptations can help meet these needs, adaptations could also end up overburdening youth workers and programs with responsibility for essential services. Organizations are still finding a balance between their missions, new local needs for support, and existing capacity.

### Sustainability and Next Steps

What does youth work look like on the other side of this crisis? But there are also serious concerns about how program disruptions may impact sustainability. Organizations are also seeking guidance on when and how to safely resume in-person services.

As organizations plan their next steps, they can also take this opportunity to act on commitments to partner with youth and families. There shouldn't be a trade-off between effective crisis response and bringing stakeholders to the table. Youth and family voice is important now, more than ever.

### Call for Action from the Field

- Youth and families should be prioritized in internet access initiatives.
- Youth-serving organizations need clear guidance on how and when to re-open.
- Nonprofits and funders have to work closely to ensure program sustainability.
- Youth and families need a seat at the decision-making table as programs adapt to changing conditions.
- Organizations need new resources and best practice guidelines for engaging with youth online.



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Center for Community  
and Nonprofit Studies  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON