

# Impact Plan for Better Behavioral Health Among Teens in Floyd County

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# Executive Summary

For our impact plan, we created a Teen Resource Guide aimed at preventing teen substance use and mental health disorders. We chose this project not only because it was something that was of interest to us but also because we discovered a need in the Floyd County community for such a guide. When reviewing the materials that other organizations had available, we found that none of them addressed teen substance use disorder through a mental health lens and very few of them considered upstream preventative approaches. We also identified an outlet for our Teen Resource Guide in the form of the Floyd County Teen Maze. This event gave us a viable way to distribute our guide and have a meaningful impact in the community.

When considering how to create our guide, we started by focusing on upstream preventative strategies that improve mental health by treating the root cause of many disorders. We researched various programs, methods, approaches, and frameworks. We also drew on the experiences we gained during our classes and internship. We settled on using an interdisciplinary approach combining a stress reduction program (mindfulness and meditation) with a suicide prevention program (Sources of Strength). We used these approaches for the centerfold of our guide and incorporated the values embedded in them throughout our guide. We also made sure to create a document that was teen-centered and focused on actions teens could take independent of access to resources or facilities.

While working on our Teen Resource Guide, we obtained major stakeholders from several Floyd County organizations including RFCCCY, FAD, Georgia Hope, Highland Rivers Choices Clubhouse, and Living Proof Recovery. We also obtained input from two stakeholders outside of the community: Sir Bright from The Batho Group, who provided training to our class on mindfulness and meditation, and LaTreece Roby, a trainer from Sources of Strength who also provided training. We collected input from our stakeholders and implemented their feedback at regular intervals throughout the process.

Over the course of six weeks, we managed to create our Teen Resource Guide through a research-driven, interdisciplinary, collaborative, user-centered and iterative approach. We handed out over 250 copies of our guide at Teen Maze and created a poster with a QR code for online access. By doing this, we reached at least 250 teens and provided them with access to resources they would not otherwise have in their community. We succeeded at reaching all of the goals we set for our project, left a measurable impact in the community, created materials that can be recycled for use by other organizations in the future, and contributed to our own professional growth and development.

# Background

There's a common motto in our society today: "our children are the future." We often hear this saying used in education, marketing, career training programs, job advertising, political campaigns, slogans, and many other rhetorical contexts we encounter every day. Currently, our future is facing an unprecedented epidemic of both substance use and mental health disorders (Ali & Dubenitz, 2021; Augusti & Hafstad, 2021; Cruden & Karmali, 2021; LaBossier, et al., 2022; Spencer & Weathers, 2020; Stephenson, 2021). According to one 2021 study that focused on teen mental health disorders, "suicide was the second leading cause of death among adolescents aged 12 to 17 years, accounting for 1,580 deaths, and nearly 1 in 5 (19%) had serious thoughts of suicide in 2019, up from 14% in 2009" (Stephenson, 2021). According to a 2022 study, between April 2016 and September 2019, "stimulant overdoses increased by 2.3% per quarter among youth ages 15-24" (LaBossier, et al., 2022). These troubling trends, if not addressed, will lead to a generation in crisis.

# Increasing Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

It is unsurprising that we're seeing an uptick in substance use disorders alongside mental health disorders. A known mental health disorder is a risk factor for developing a substance use disorder and a known substance use disorder is a risk factor for developing a mental health disorder (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2022; Mayo Clinic Staff, 2019). One study, which focused primarily on opioid users, found that nearly a quarter of those with opioid use disorder (OUD) showed suicidal behavior or ideation and that mental health treatment reduced that risk by 28%–49% (Ali & Dubenitz, 2021). Another study, which focused on identifying unmet mental health needs among those with OUD, found that mental health distress, having an unmet mental health treatment need, and social isolation were high risk factors among people with OUD. The study concluded that strategies intended to prevent OUD should address mental health distress (Cruden & Karmali, 2021). Because these two health crises are so intertwined, a successful strategy for improving outcomes must be able to target both issues.

Many experts have focused on the pandemic's effect on adolescent mental health and substance use disorders, and while there is no denying that the trauma of the pandemic had a profound and lasting impact across the globe, there is also evidence that the pandemic may have exacerbated a trend that was already present. Mental health experts have been seeing an increase in adolescent mental health issues since the early 2000s with one study marking a 4.5% increase in depression among the 12-17 age group between 2005 and 2017 (Augusti & Hafstad, 2021). Similar trends have been seen with substance use disorders, particularly opioid use (Spencer & Weathers, 2020). The pandemic also exacerbated systemic inequalities and the need for both mental health and addiction services. From this, many researchers have determined that effective strategies need to meet people where they are by bringing treatment and access to treatment to underserved areas. Most researchers also agree that information must become more accessible to people in these communities (Alegría, et al., 2021). Therefore, a successful strategy for improving outcomes must consider equality of treatment and access to information.