



YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

COVID-19 Impact Statement

Throughout the unfolding of COVID-19, Youth Services Network (YSN) members have prioritized the safety and well-being of our youth and young family program participants, staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, donors and partners. We have followed all recommendations of the Minnesota Department of Health, as well as additional measures, to reduce the spread of COVID-19/coronavirus. Our organizations are on the front lines with many programs open 24/7. We respond daily to crisis situations involving the most vulnerable youth in our community-unaccompanied children and youth experiencing homelessness, survivors of sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking, as well as child abuse and neglect. These children, youth and young families cannot “Just Stay Home” because HOME is not safe or does not exist for them. YSN members did not close our organizational doors because doing so would have had an incredibly negative impact on the youth and young families who rely on us for uninterrupted safe and supportive services.

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact across the world. It has also shined a bright light on the racial injustices and health disparities within Minnesota communities, and our nation. Along with this, the pandemic has exposed issues of poverty, homelessness, sex trafficking and other forms of violence.

Listed below are a few of the impacts we are seeing from the youth experiencing homelessness, sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking and youth who are encountering childhood abuse and neglect:

- Limited access to mental health services, despite the increased need due to the lack of in person therapy and crisis intervention;
- Inconsistent support from traditional systems such as school districts, child protection and welfare services because of limited in-person meetings and virtual platforms;
- Out of home placements for residential mental health and substance abuse treatment, and child protection and welfare placements limiting their eligibility to come onsite and reducing placement options;
- Reduced number of emergency shelter beds due to safety protocols such as social distance requirements, creating barriers to identifying an open bed for a youth experiencing homelessness;

- Youth without a safe home to live in or no home are at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19, and spreading the virus unknowingly;
- Due to the multitude of disparities youth experiencing homelessness and sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking face, we are serving more youth who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ, who are at heightened risk for contracting COVID-19

Additionally, YSN members are encountering additional unanticipated impacts, which include, yet are not limited to::

- Increased program expenses due to the costs associated with following the COVID-19 safety protocols based on guidance from MDH and the CDC such as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), social distancing and more;
- Staffing gaps due to public health recommendations regarding isolation/quarantine related to COVID-19 exposure;
- Potential decrease in 2021 general operating funds due to cancellation/rescheduling of fundraising events or restructuring to virtual events;
- Uncertainty with grant funding cycles through 2021

As we head into 2021 with the knowledge that we do not yet have an end in site for the pandemic, we are appealing to you to share our collective stories, and experiences, and push for additional resources, including support of operations, to best support the work we continue to endeavor.