

2023 Youth Listening Sessions

Data Summary and Analysis

Gathered and compiled by Marcia Ratliff, Engage Winona
for Winona County Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention

About the project

Engage Winona collaborated with ASAP to engage LGBTQIA+ youth in Winona by hosting listening sessions to discover their needs and challenges related to substance use and preventive factors. Between November 2022 and May 2023, we hosted three listening sessions with a total participation of 37 individuals.

ASAP assisted with finding community partners for the listening sessions and providing refreshments and incentives for participation. Other entities that helped with this project include Advocacy Center of Winona, Riverway Learning Community, Bluffview Montessori School, and Ellie Mental Health.

Activities and participation

We designed a listening session with a short demographic survey followed by a gallery-walk with four questions. Students read each question and wrote their answers on sticky notes, then rotated to the next station. At the end of the gallery walk, we had a short debrief discussion. All questions were anonymous and optional. We created the questions in partnership with ASAP and their evaluator, Melissa Adolfson.

We hosted listening sessions with student groups at Bluffview Montessori School (6th grade), Riverway Learning Community S1 (7th and 8th grade), and Riverway LGBTQ club (4th-6th grade). Broadly, demographics were as follows:

- Students were between 9-14 years old. (Fig. 1)
- Most students lived in Winona.
- Students were about 60% white, with strong representation of other races. (Fig. 2)



- About 30% of students involved were straight, 24% gay or lesbian, 20% pan or omnisexual, 12% bisexual. This question was not asked of 4th-6th graders, in keeping with Minnesota Student Survey practices. (Fig. 3)
- Many students chose to self-describe their gender, as shown in the chart. (Fig. 4)
- About equal numbers of students received free and reduced-price lunch as did not.

Figure 1: Ages of students

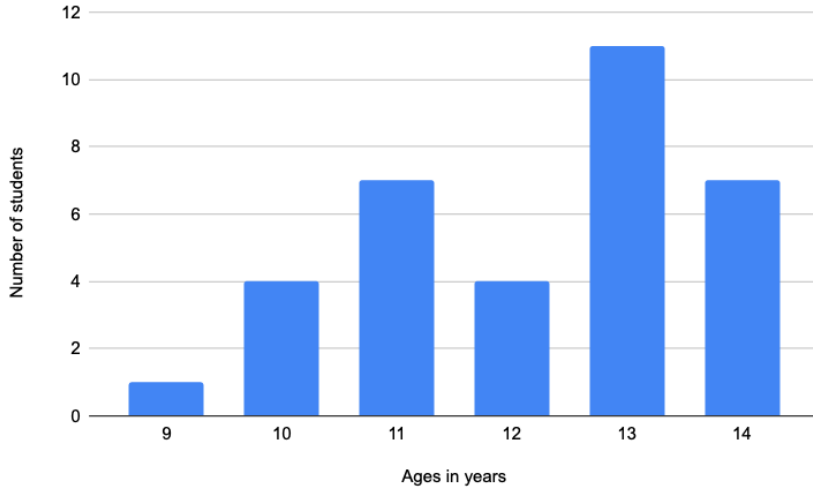


Figure 2: Races of students

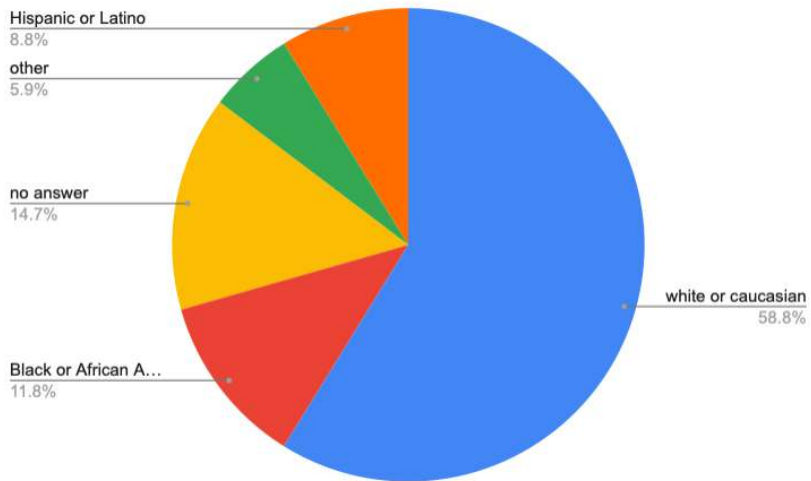


Figure 3: Sexual orientation

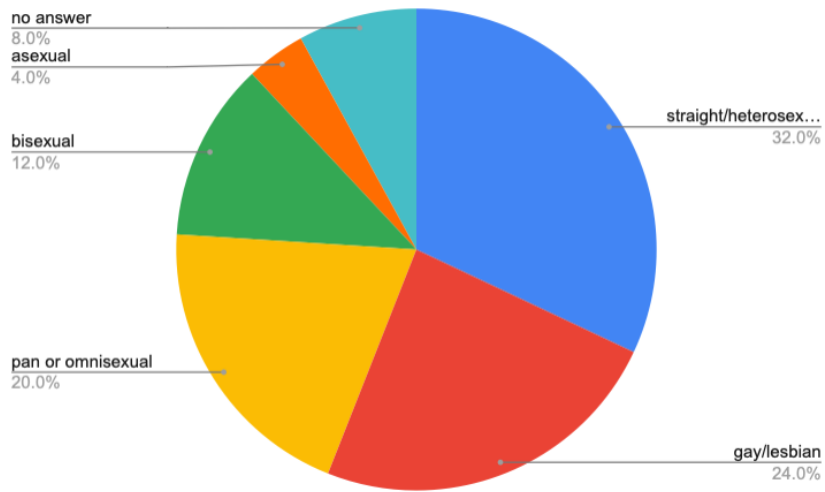


Figure 4: Gender identity

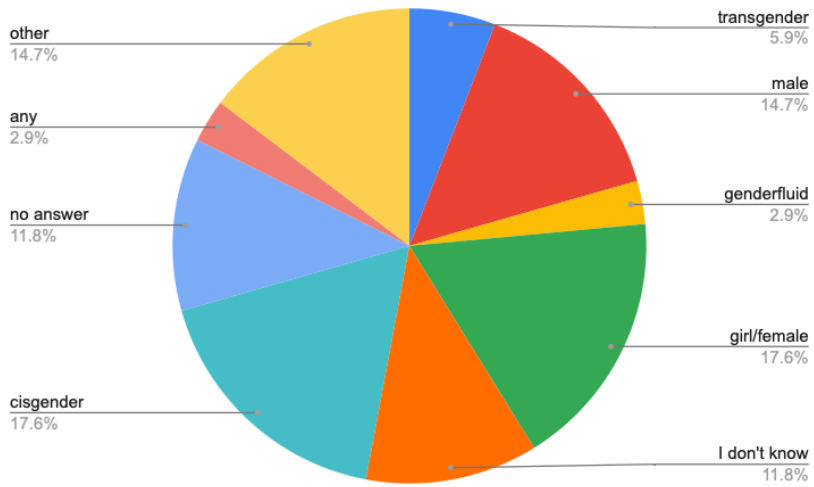
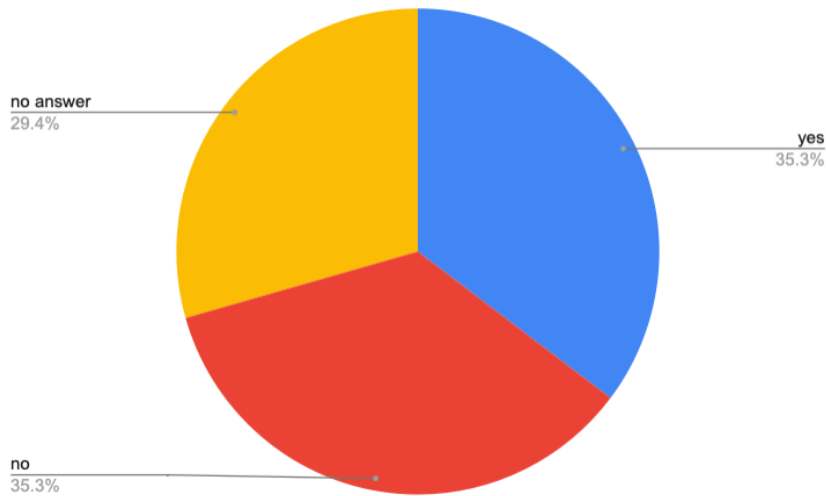


Figure 5: Free and reduced lunch



Key takeaways

Students access a range of coping mechanisms for social-emotional regulation and mental health. Coping with emotions is an important aspect of substance abuse prevention and should be supported in schools and at home.

Students are affected by social issues in the community, including lack of LGBTQIA+ support and representation, along with racism. They expressed a need for support from people at school and in the community, and support to navigate and build solid friendships with peers.

Students had tons of ideas for how our community can do better! Their ideas include support and understanding from teachers, staff, and adults in their lives - both formal and informal; cultivating a community where mental health conversation is normalized; a safe hang-out space and things to do; and less homework.

Top themes by question

This section summarizes themes we heard in written and oral comments during the gallery walk and debrief discussion. For each major theme, we've included a selection of comments. The selected comments show the range of comments received, and the full set of raw data is included with this report.

When you have free time, what do you most enjoy doing?

Students had a range of things they enjoyed doing with their free time, including being physically active, making art, hanging out with friends and family, being outside, cuddling their



pets, and solo activities including reading, listening to music, video games, and watching movies.

Top themes

Solo activities (19 comments)

- reading books
- listening to music
- sleeping
- video games
- watching youtube, playing roblox, knitting and crochet
- video games and watch movies. hardley get free time though
- listening to music, or shows/youtube, reading and video games also

Friends (9 comments)

- trying to make friends but it's hard and I don't have many
- hanging out with friends
- Video games (with friends)
- playing with my friends

Being active (8 comments)

- sports
- kickball, soccer, village warfare

Making art (7 comments)

- Writing, poems
- songs, music writing
- lego-ing
- I love drawing and painting

When you are having a really rough day, what are things you do to have a better day?

Who do you go to? Why did you pick those things and people?

Students shared a wide variety of coping skills and resources they go to on rough days.

Responses included being active, making art, getting out the emotions, talking to friends, family, or trusted adults, relaxing with pets, going outside, getting rest, and alone time.

Top themes

Solo activities (22 comments)

- I cuddle my stuffed animals
- I want to be left alone and listen to music by myself
- Binge watch scary movies - takes my mind off things
- Listen to eminem cause he good
- I like listening to music and keeping my mind busy (video games, reading, shows) it helps me because my mind goes away and I don't have to think very much



- Find something you enjoy and try it out
- Take time for yourself
- Mind your own business, leave it alone if it's not your problem
- Take a shower (rinsing off the bad vibes)
- Sometimes it's not just people but also things (that are comforting) - sometimes just petting a cat or dog, or blowing bubbles away and imagining that it's your worries

Friends (13 comments)

- Friends - forget about bad day
- Go outside and play with neighbors
- unload/tell what happened
- Talk to friends/pout
- I go to the most faithful people to me, meaning: My boyfriend, my best friend, my therapy friend. I go to them for obvious reasons
- Faith/friends I trust or paint, music, calming stuff, or video games to escape reality. Because I feel I can trust them. Like I said escape reality
- I go to my girlfriend and my guinea pigs to talk and maybe watch tv or a movie. I pick them because they are loving and don't judge me
- Sit on my phone and try to talk with people (sleep)

Family (9 comments)

- I go to my mom because she will give me a hug no matter what
- My mom, because she knows helpful stuff
- Play with siblings
- Talk to my partner, my mom and dad or my siblings and grandparents
- I go to my family and dogs. Because they make me feel loved

Pets (6 comments)

- I go to nobody but my cat
- I go to my kitty because he is my emotional support animal (sort of) and I love him very much
- Dog
- I squish my kitty, I also rage on minecraft, I also eat food

Other - getting out emotions, being active or creative, resting (10 comments)

- Go outside, get fresh air
- When I am having a bad day I listen to music and play basketball
- Go for a walk (if the weather is nice)
- I paint/draw because its relaxing
- Destroy all the messed up drawings I did! And hug my cat (squeeze him) (don't worry he's fine)
- Cry or watch TV or eat
- Punch things
- Cry



- Scream because sometimes u just gotta

What one thing do you wish adults understood about your life?

Responses to this question included themes relating to students' relationships with adults in their lives, identities and personalities, school environment, and peers.

Top themes

Relationships with adults (8 comments)

- the only reason I don't talk about it to you because you gave me trust issues
- parenting me better
- They understand our mistakes
- not be annoying. don't talk to me when I'm mad.
- that teens and children need privacy and it's not something they should be able to take away
- how idc about their boomer opinions
- leave me alone
- nothing about my life :)

Identity/personality (7 comments)

- I didn't choose to be a girl, it's the way I feel
- that I am not going to be perfect
- being a kid is playing video games in this generation
- Just because I'm young, doesn't mean I don't know what/who I am, or feel.
- That sometimes I cry for no reason
- understanding about what I'm going through. leaving me alone when I ask. Just understand me. Don't let kids at school get away with racism, it's not fair to me or others.
- no matter what you do over 50% of the time we don't know what we want for ourselves or you

School and peers (7 comments)

- other people
- The popularity status in school
- that somebody should have been expelled years ago
- why school is hell to me
- Don't let kids at school get away with racism, it's not fair to me or others.
- what children are diagnosed with for them to help
- how a grade is just a letter

What are the top 3 issues you and your friends face in Winona?

Students pointed to general community environment and resources, concerns about bullying and peers, activities for youth, LGBTQ-specific concerns, mental health and school, and other issues.



Top themes

Community (21 comments)

Social justice

- 1. Any sort of rude person
- 2. Unfriendly establishments
- Druggies and bad people, potential racism
- Literally everyone in winona
- Crazy catholics
- Entitled white men with trucks
- Neighbors complaining
- Crazy republicans who are christian
- Islamophobia
- People looking at you funny for no apparent reason
- People
- slurs
- Racism (x6)
- 1. Bullying 2. Drugs

Events

- 2. Not a lot of events for different age groups
- Lack of cultural events

Bullying and peers (21 comments)

- Bullying x11
- It's a small place, so it's easy to see friends, but that creates more drama and drama = sadness and sadness = depression and depression = self harm
- 1. Too much DRAMA over nothing
- Being left out
- Toxic friends/boyfriends
- Finding a trustworthy friend
- Being left out - friends acting mean or rude
- Exclusion
- Random toxic kids
- 3. No friends
- hard to make friends

Activities (9 comments)

- Boredom x5
- Nothing to do
- The lack of stuff to do
- 1. Weather
- no things to do



LGBTQIA+ (7 comments)

- 1. Lack of LGBTQIA+ support
- 1. Seeing representation
- 3. Finding people who are similar to me
- Wrong use of pronouns
- Transphobics
- transphobic comments
- Homophobic comments

Mental health, school (4 comments)

- 2. Overwhelmed with school work
- Public school food - it's disgusting
- 2. Important mental health
- Some (not enough) mental health resources

Other (15 comments)

- 3. Lack of money and food
- My house is just screaming
- Poverty
- I don't no
- Parents (mainly mom), family

After looking at this data, what do you think are some of the unique challenges for the LGBTQIA+ youth in Minnesota? (Note: Data charts were displayed with this question as shown below and in the appendix, and we explained it orally as well. This question was omitted for the 4th-6th grade group).





In response to this question, students pointed to discrimination, mental health challenges, difficulty navigating relationships, and need for LGBTQIA+ specific support.

Top themes

Discrimination (9 comments)

- Unfairness x2
- They are despised based on their
- Religion
- 1. Discrimination
- Facing karens in stores, streets, and more.
- Heterosexual and cisgender people were bullied less than anybody else
- Some people think that LGBTQ+ is weird but its not at all. Those people who think it's weird are who are weird at you
- That the LGBTQIA+ community isn't getting enough respect for who they are

Mental health (6 comments)

- Body dysmorphia/phobia
- Anxiety x2
- 2. anxiety/depression
- Higher rates of anxiety and depression x2

Relationships (5 comments)

- Finding other gay people to date



- Can't make friends
- Don't fit in activities
- Fitting in
- Not being many ways to meet other people

Support (5 comments)

- Finding people who support you
- Finding support and feeling support at school
- Well, I don't know how to respond, except this is so very true! I don't think teachers/parents and others should hover. But make sure it doesn't get out of hand
- Lack of supportive school staff
- Bullying is bad and a trustworthy adult can be helpful

Other (5 comments)

- Private questions
- Face none *slay*
- Bae
- People dressing in boy/girl clothes
- It looks like the LGBTQ+ faces more challenges than heterosexual and cisgender people

What are your ideas for how our community can support kids' and teens' mental health?

Students had lots of great ideas for how the Winona community can support their mental health, from formal and informal support to activities and spaces where they belong to improvements to the school and community environment. Comments for this section are reflected in their entirety.

Top themes

Support - formal and informal (14 comments)

School support

- Give less work and help them more
- Ask daily questions to see if they are okay
- Take note on what the students going through - what helps the students focus and actually want to do the work
- Teachers ask students/check in if see something wrong
- Make sure that all staff are supportive to EVERYONE

General/community support

- Doesn't have to be severe to get help
- More accessible mental health therapy -totes cool (smiling face drawing)
- Help them in indirect ways. Like when they are struggling or need help with something but won't come up to you. You go up to them instead
- Don't be mean you don't know what's going on in their life
- Talk more openly about it and help people find agencies for counseling or mental health
- Let them feel supported
- Make them feel ok when talking



- Engaging in community groups, having access to mental health supports and resources in schools, normalizing mental health!
- Support can look like someone doing what you really want them to do

School and community environment (10 comments)

- Not letting people get away from racism
- Less racism
- Don't pile students with 6 pages of work every day
- Lowering standards (for homework, etc)
- Yeet bullying out the window
- Less bullying
- All causes of bullying, no matter big or small have consequences
- We need more recess for public schools!
- We need newer better school building
- More protests

Space and activities (9 comments)

- A space to just to be after a bad day
- A game you could answer questions about stuff and if you don't want to answer 1 you could click skip
- A safe space
- A place to hang out
- We need more just... free time
- Bowling
- Nate and ally's
- A hang out space
- Safe place

Other (5 comments)

- By not putting these questions on us
- Live
- live/learn
- Meow
- Chillen

If you could wave a magic wand, what one thing would you change at school, home or in Winona?

We didn't always have time to dive deep on this question in the sessions, but we received a range of profound answers, shown below. Answers included cultural shifts, economic improvements, and kid-friendly changes.

- First off that's not possible but unrealistically I would change all racism throughout winona because it's annoying for anybody and everybody
- Make people nicer
- One thing I would change in the world is racist police



- Give everyone that I like 2 trillion dollars
- Lower gas prices
- I would change all forms of payment to be a comfortable wage for everyone
- End world hunger for 2 things
- Nobody has to worry about money ever again
- Let parents understand their child
- Naptimes for all ages
- Make all schools where kids can do what they want
- A bigger inside place to hang out at
- For everyone to forget me to start over
- Wish - perfect world without sin, death, and things brought about by sin (illness, birth defects, etc)

Appendix

This appendix includes the questions asked in the gallery walk, the data charts and context, the pre/post conversation written questions, and all raw data (attached).

