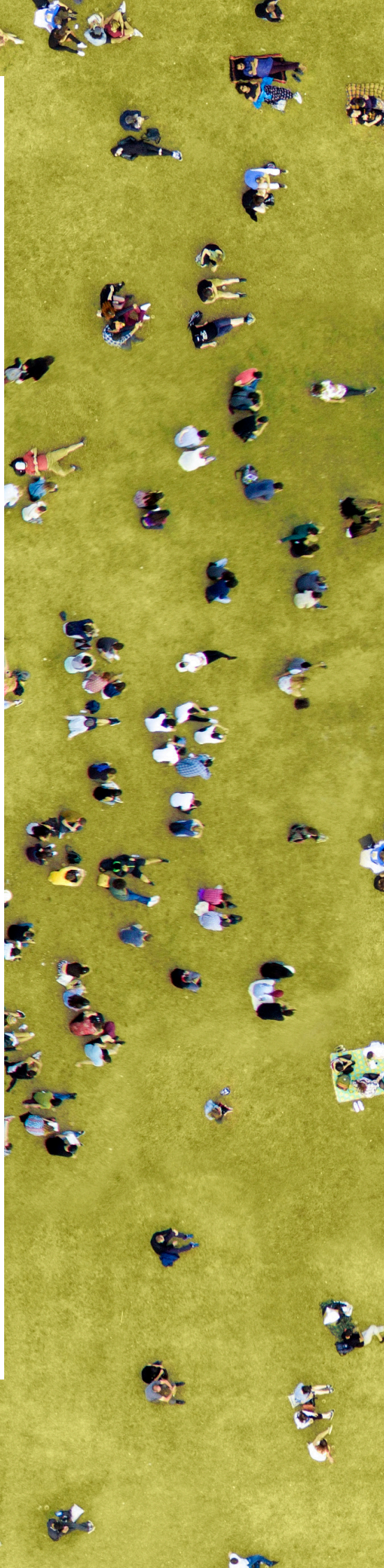
YOUTH REALITIES IN SACRAMENTO DURING COVID-19

A RAPID RESPONSE AND A CALL TO ACTION



EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

A survey was conducted in April 2020 by citiesRISE, a global effort to mobilize youth to create mental health friendly cities. In Sacramento, 277 young people took the survey. The findings showed high levels of anxiety, fear, loneliness, stress and uncertainty since the start of the shelter-at-home order resulting from COVID-19.

A key finding is that 63% of respondents reported not knowing where to get help even if they were willing to seek it out. We know that important and relatively new crisis intervention services and supports targeted to youth have been funded by Sacramento County. Young people, however, are saying that they are unaware of these and other support services that are designed for situations that impact mental health.

A challenge is that youth want to talk to people who look like them or who come from similar backgrounds. In doing so, they are seeking coping tools for stress reduction, relaxation, managing uncertainty, time management, and positive thinking.

LISTENING TO **YOUNG PEOPLE**

Cities rise is dedicated to mobilizing youth voice to create mental health friendly cites. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, citiesRISE decided to ask youth in the five cities we work with around the world about the impacts of the crisis on their lives. With most responses to the pandemic developed by older generations, we felt it was critical to listen to what young people are experiencing. We wanted to understand:

- How young people were feeling as a result of being locked down and how it was impacting them and their families.
- Where they get information and who they would seek help from
- What gave youth hope and what they needed to take care of themselves.

During April 2020 we conducted a survey that attracted 1000+ responses globally, including 277 responses from youth in the larger Sacramento area. This short report provides a summary of the responses from young people in Sacramento.

CITIES**RISE**

DATA FROM SACRAMENTO

DEMOGRAPHICS

277
Participants

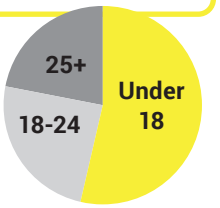
Gender identity of participants

68.6% Female

28.2% Male

3.4% Non-binary

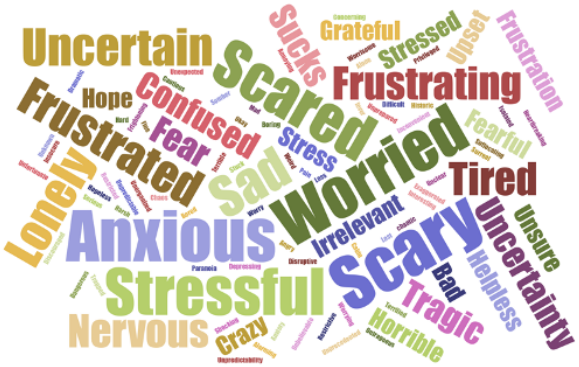
65% say they do not know where to go to get mental health support



Age of participants

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE **STAYING CONNECTED**

GENERAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

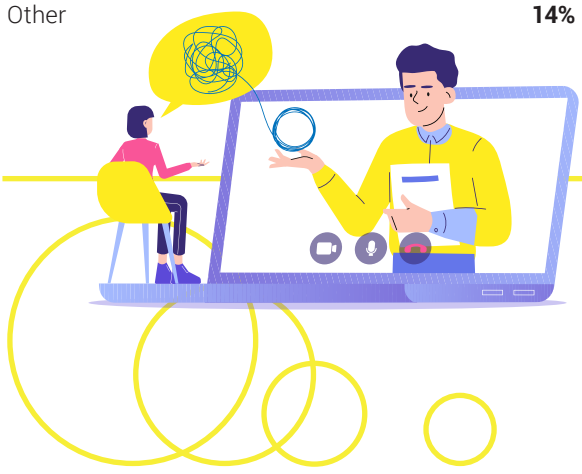


TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

Stress reduction	58%
Relaxation	49%
Positive thinking	46%
Time management	43%
Coping when overwhelmed	32%
Combatting loneliness	28%
Managing uncertainty	25%
Connections on social media	16%
Help with basic needs	13%
How to access a therapist	13%
How to access a peer advocate	7%
Suicide prevention	3%

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Video counseling	39%
Telecounseling	24%
Digital applications	12%
Group counseling	10%
Other	14%



HOW YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Friend	Family	Counselor	Psychologist	Psychiatrist	Physician	Social Worker	Volunteer
63%	**47%**	**27%**	**18%**	**13%**	**10%**	**4%**	**4%**

INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM SACRAMENTO

Where youth are getting information about COVID

- Family and friends are a key source of information of COVID-19 related information.
- Over half report using social media as key source of information. Under 18s are 50% more likely to report using social media as key information source, and also more likely to use news as source of information.
- 87% consider themselves well-informed, and 99% are staying home when possible.

How they are feeling about COVID and the Stay-at-Home order

- Anxiety, fear, loneliness and uncertainty predominate

How young people are connecting and from where do they seek supports

- Digital platforms are the key ways youth communicate especially using Instagram and TikTok.
- Almost all respondents are able to stay home and are doing so to preserve their mental and physical safety.
- 63% of respondents when asked where would they obtain mental health information and support say they turn to family and friends. Less than 14 % would seek help from a therapist or mental health professional.
- 65% of respondents had no awareness of mental health organizations, programs and services.

> **"That we're all doing this together, we're not alone in trying to figure out our new realities."**
>
> Participant, Sacramento

What the needs of young people are

- There is a need for coping tools for stress reduction, relaxation, managing uncertainty, time management, and positive thinking.
- Talk to youth to make sure messaging is youth friendly
- School districts, cities and county mental health providers should deliver information on platforms that youth use such as Instagram and TikTok.
- Expand peer to peer supports (like county youth advocates, peers talking to peers forum's, cross age peer mentoring), and support SB 803 to create a state peer specialist certification program in California.
- Better link county mental health peer advocates to schools and out of school settings where youth gather.
- To address loneliness, continue to support virtual gathering spaces for youth to connect, gain skills and enrich themselves.

If we compare Sacramento with the other four cities that participated in the study, we make the following observations:

- Social media is predominant source of information in Chennai, Nairobi, and Bogota. In Seattle and Sacramento, family and friends are predominant source of information.
- Almost all are able to stay home and are doing so to preserve their mental and physical safety. Few are talking to a mental health counsellor or therapist.
- Respondents in Nairobi are less likely to be able to stay home safely.
- Friends and family are predominant sources of mental health support. Respondents from Nairobi also report reaching out to psychologists and counselors at greater rate than other city respondents.
- Consistent need for information on stress reduction, relaxation, and thinking positively.

HOW CITIESRISE SACRAMENTO IS RESPONDING TO THE **RESULTS OF THE STUDIES**

Virtual Pop Ups

Training providers on implementing virtual youth pop ups (technology and logistics) and how to a) incorporate a mental health component into the pop up programming; and b) how to connect pop up participants to local mental health youth advocates.

Messaging and Outreach

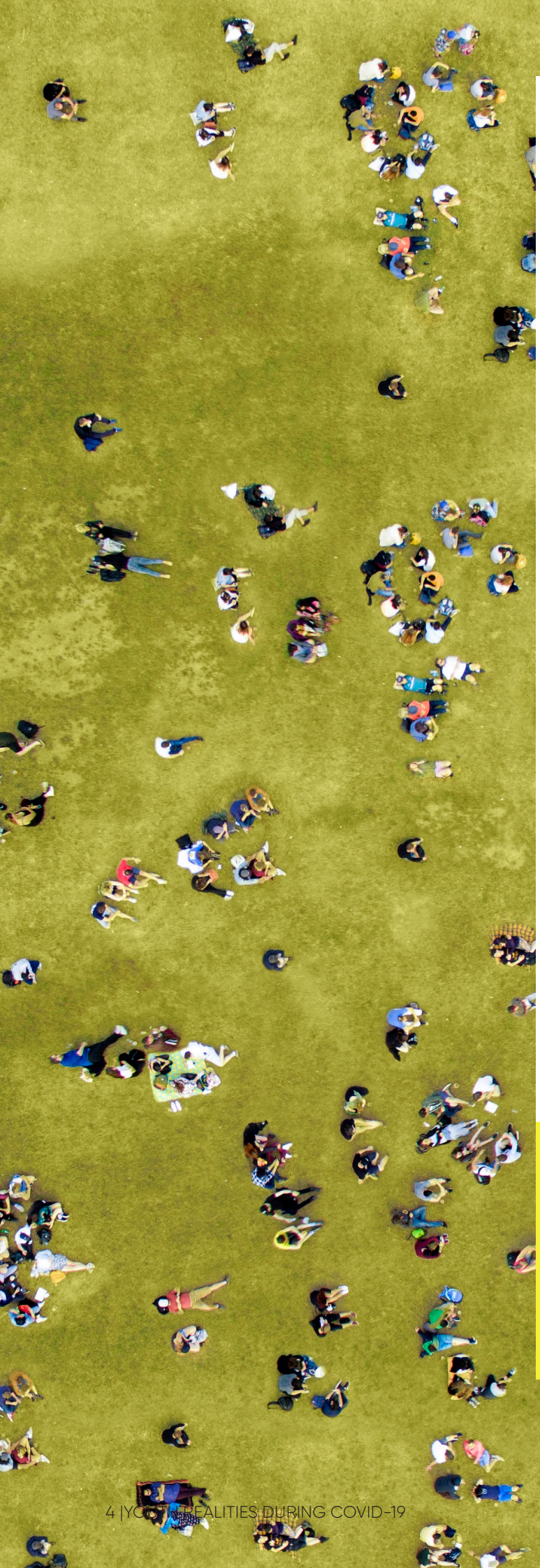
Developing youth-focused/youth-friendly messages to help youth know they are not alone and can find help if they need someone to talk to and working with youth influences (e.g. artists, sports figures, etc.) to push out these messages and provide venues for youth to express themselves.

Youth-Focused/Youth-Friendly Resource Guide

Developed a streamlined mental health resource guide to refer youth to supports and to help youth easily find help if they need it.

Mental Health First Aid/Suicide Prevention Trainings

Working with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) and ACEs connection to develop trainings for youth development organizations (e.g. extended learning providers, pop up providers, youth employment agencies, and other non-traditional mental health workers) to help adults better respond to the anxiety, isolation, and fear youth are having from the pandemic and shelter-in-place order.



Sacramento is one of the five cities that is pioneering the creation of Mental Health Friendly Cities that is setting new goals and standards for young people's mental health and well-being.

citiesRISE is a multi-stakeholder initiative that includes many of the world's leading experts and practitioners. We are dedicated to applying the best of global evidence and local community experience to scale up proven interventions and models. Collective action and a systems approach are at the heart of our interventions and young people at the leading edge of change.

citiesRISE harnesses the creativity and connectivity of young people and strengthens their capacity to collaborate across sectors and with senior professionals to drive systems change. By its nature, our model is flexible, agile and able to respond quickly to events. We believe that this is how mental health will be transformed.

The study was carried out as a collaborative effort by citiesRISE team and partners.

We are first and foremost thankful to the respondents who took the time to share their realities.

In Sacramento, we are grateful for the work of Jay Schenirer, Greg Garcia, Sommer Hayes, Bina Lefkovitz and Claudia Jasin.

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