



# MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE EXPANSION

BENEFITTING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN SOUTH HILLS COMMUNITIES



**Marigold Evaluation, LLC**



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*"As a growing problem in our society, it is important to understand how to help. I feel better prepared to help someone in crisis." – QPR Training Participant*

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## Introduction

[Outreach Teen & Family Services, Inc.](#) (Outreach) nestled in the South Hills area of Pittsburgh, is a dedicated non-profit organization with nearly five decades of commitment to serving youth and families. Its mission is to provide accessible, confidential, and affordable counseling services to young individuals and their families, addressing a wide spectrum of challenges, including anger management, family dynamics, school-related issues, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and an array of additional concerns. They have become known for swift access to services, ensuring that clients receive assistance or referrals to help promptly.

Outreach Teen & Family Services, Inc. (Outreach) recently developed a strategic plan with a goal of capitalizing on its unique model focusing on prevention, education, and intervention. Outreach intends to become hub of mental health counseling and programmatic offerings for the South Hills communities it serves. Funding from the Staunton Farms Foundation, beginning in October 2021, allowed Outreach to expand on past experience working with school districts, community organizations, police, fire, and first responders.

*The primary goal of the proposal was to expand mental health and wellness programs and services throughout South Hills' communities.*

Outreach planned to accomplish this expansion by offering programs for teens and families at partner organizations throughout the South Hills. In addition, the agency has started a youth-led podcast to reach teens through social media.

## Evaluation

During a year-long period of data collection and reporting, [Marigold Evaluation, LLC](#) served as an external evaluator for Outreach in an effort to assess how its programming is received by the new communities in which it has been working. An understanding of how the municipalities, school-district partners, libraries, police departments, and other community partners view their partnerships with Outreach, the programming Outreach offers their patrons or clients, and the value Outreach services provide to the community will set the stage for reflecting on current programming and the direction Outreach should pursue as the project develops and works towards its longer-term goals and outcomes.

This initial feedback is formative in nature. The evaluation focused on two key activities:

- 1) the development and implementation of survey protocols for use with participants at these programs and
- 2) a round of key informant interviews with community partners who have hosted programs developed by Outreach over the past two years.

These qualitative components will enable key informants and participants to contemplate the inception, evolution, execution, and outcomes of the programs. They will provide respondents with an opportunity to contemplate successes, identify challenges, and examine emerging issues.

## Key Findings

- **Outreach is well-positioned to understand participant perceptions of the knowledge, attitudes, and value of the programming they receive from the agency.**
  - Outreach, in conjunction with the evaluation team, developed a survey template for its programs that can be used post program events to gather additional feedback from participants. This will inform the agency about
    - the typical characteristics of participants;
    - participants' self-reported knowledge about the program content following each program event;

- participants' self-reported attitudes and/or behaviors following each program event;
    - participants' perception of the value of the program event; and
    - participants' ratings of the program event and the training provided.
  - As the programs have started to use the surveys post programming, data are becoming available for analysis.
- The QPR Program had piloted a survey developed within the agency. Findings indicated that participants rated the training and the trainer highly. Seven in 10 (70%) respondents gave the highest rating "5" to both the training as a whole and the counselor who led the session.
- Key informant interviews with six community partners in the South Hills area identified several themes.
  - Outreach was welcomed as a trusted community partner due to their expertise and because each institution recognized a need within their community.
  - Respondents expressed satisfaction with the variety of program options available at Outreach and valued the opportunity to customize programs according to their unique requirements.
  - Respondents were able to provide examples of how participants valued the programming and looked forward to future programs or events.
  - Most respondents plan to include additional programming in future planning and would be willing to budget for it.
  - Outreach has been a professional and "seamless" partner.

## Detailed Findings

### Post-Program Surveys

In collaboration with the evaluation team, Outreach developed a survey template for its programs that can be used after program events to gather additional feedback from participants. Outreach agreed the focus at this time would be on adult participants in Outreach programs. The agency would like to gain more information about

- the typical characteristics of participants (e.g., what neighborhoods they are residing in, what professional or volunteer needs may be driving their need for information that Outreach can provide)
- participants' self-reported knowledge about the program content following each program event;

- participants' self-reported attitudes and/or behaviors following each program event;
- participants' perception of the value of the program event; and
- participants' ratings of the program event and the training provided.

Together with the evaluation team, Outreach developed a set of core questions to ask following each program. Additional questions specific to each program can be added to gain feedback about the specific content of each program. The team reviewed the logic model, reviewed expected learning outcomes for each program, and researched literature for validated survey questions for the program topics.

Outreach piloted a revised [QPR survey](#) in June 2023 and a [Mental Health 101](#) survey in September 2023.<sup>1</sup> Surveys are fielded via Google Forms. Google Forms was chosen due to its low cost and ease of use for the administrative team at Outreach. Data are easily accessible, and reports are produced in real time, each time the surveys are fielded.<sup>2</sup>

### QPR Post-Event Survey Findings

[QPR \(Question, Persuade, and Refer\) Gatekeeper Training](#) for Suicide Prevention is an emergency intervention for mental health. Akin to CPR, QPR training offers ordinary citizens the tools to recognize the signs of suicidal ideation, talk about these thoughts, and offer help and resources to someone in need. QPR has been shown to prevent suicide in communities and settings where more participants are trained in how to respond to those at risk. Outreach Teen & Family counselors train participants to teach the QPR curriculum so participants can gain competence and confidence to teach others how to save lives and help prevent suicidal behaviors.

Between September 2022 and June 2023, 23 respondents from four locations offered feedback to a survey, developed by Outreach,<sup>3</sup> about the QPR Training they received from Outreach: Mount Lebanon Fire Department (57%), Peters Township Library (22%), Castle Shannon Community Library (13%), and a private company, IDL (9%).<sup>4,5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The QPR Program had been surveying participants about their experience starting in September 2022.

<sup>2</sup> To date, the revised surveys have received two responses for each program. Over time, with a sufficient number, a more robust analysis will be available.

<sup>3</sup> This survey was developed prior to the engagement of the external evaluator. Findings are included in the report. Future survey questions will differ somewhat from those presented in this section.

<sup>4</sup> Rounding error. Sum exceeds 100%.

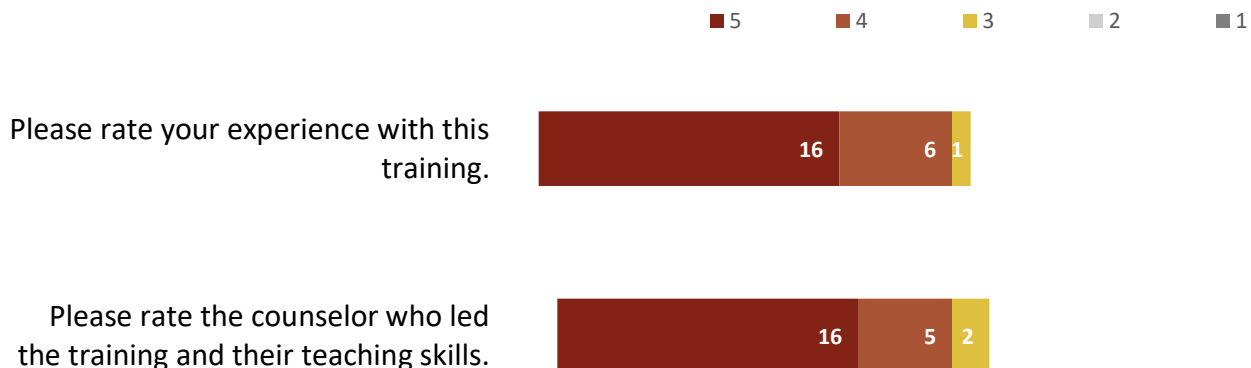
<sup>5</sup> Most respondents – 21 of the 23 (91%) used a survey developed by Outreach prior to having engaged an external evaluation firm. Two later respondents used a survey developed jointly by Outreach and Marigold Evaluation, LLC. This

**About the Respondents.** Respondents described themselves as first responders/helping professionals (57%), parent/guardians of pre-teens or teenagers (17%), teachers/counselors or others with a personal stake in helping youth (13%), or community members committed to ensuring youth have a safe environment in which to grow (13%).

Just over half (12, 53%) of the respondents had heard of Outreach prior to the QPR Training. Fifty-seven percent (57%) heard about the training through their place of work, four (17%) from their library, two (9%) from the fire station, and two (9%) directly from Outreach. The two remaining respondents heard about the training from a community magazine and the community e-mail bulletin.

**About the QPR Training.** When asked to rate the training as a whole and the counselor who led the session on a scale of "1" to "5", with "5" being the highest, most respondents offered the highest rating "5" for the training (57%) and for the counselor (57%) alike. No respondents gave a rating of "1" or "2" (see Chart 1 below).

**Chart 1. Seven in 10 (70%) respondents gave the highest rating "5" to both the training as a whole and the counselor who led the session.**



All but one gave ratings of "4" or "5" to the QPR training experience; the remaining respondent was neutral at "3."

- Seventeen (17, 94%) of the 18 respondents who answered, "Did you achieve what you hoped to gain out of the training?" responded "yes."

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analysis includes questions which are included on both surveys and identifies changes in the denominator when appropriate.

- Twenty (20, 95%) of the 21 respondents who answered, *"Did you leave this training feeling better equipped to recognize the early signs of suicide?"* responded "yes."
- Twenty (20, 95%) of the 21 respondents who answered, *"Did you leave this training with a better understanding of how to help someone at risk of suicide and where to refer them for further assistance?"* responded "yes."

Respondents were asked what other events they would like to see from Outreach. Four respondents offered feedback including:

- *"An app for local community organizations to better spread and utilize QPR."*
- *"I think any and all educational opportunities for the community would help with the understanding of how important mental health is for our world. I think one-hour seminars on the topics of peer pressure, parenting communication, depression, bullying or cyber bullying would be fantastic."*
- *"I'd like to see a group formed to call in an emergent event to assist a struggling person more than sending them to sit in an emergency room."*
- *"Yearly review of services."*

When asked how Outreach could support them further, respondents offered four suggestions.

- *"I am glad to see Outreach is able to come and do a service for our 6th-9th graders this fall during the Meet Ups. I hope that this is a community partnership we can continue with."*

**QPR Training**  
Question  
Persuade  
Refer

- Who: Anyone who regularly interacts with youth and is in a position to recognize and refer someone at risk of suicide.
- What: QPR training helps prevent suicide by educating people to recognize the early signs of a suicide crisis and to know how and where to find help.
- Where: Caryn Jooste, NCC, brings QPR training to you. Groups of 15-20 can register for a 60-90 minute session.
- Why: By recognizing the early warning signs of suicide, opening a supportive dialogue, and securing consultation with a professional, you may prevent the need for an emergency room visit or psychiatric hospitalization.

Ask a question.  
Save a life.

To schedule a training session, contact Maggie Zangara at [mzangara@outreachteen.org](mailto:mzangara@outreachteen.org).  
All participants receive a QPR booklet and card complete with warning signs, methods to encourage help, and a list of community resources.

QPR INSTITUTE

Starting in 2022, Outreach marketed the QPR training throughout the South Hills.

- *"I was thinking this course on suicide would be a great topic for a PTA meeting at the middle school or high school. I would much rather see our PTA put time to educating our parents and caregivers than focusing on political topics/complaints or fundraising."*
- *"[Offer a] yearly talk"*
- *"I am interested in more information about family therapy services."*

In the final comments, respondents were positive about the experience and the trainer. Suggestions for improvement included using a microphone in larger rooms and ensuring organizers are mindful of those affected by suicide as they plan the training.<sup>6</sup> Comments are included below.

- *"More so my feedback would be for how my director presented the information to us that we were taking the course. I have been affected by suicide, so maybe that's why I didn't really feel well being in the training and then jumping right back into a staff meeting. It sort of left me feeling like I had an emotional whiplash evening. Again - it's mostly how our director handled the meeting nothing that Outreach did."*
- *"I have already told four other moms in the community about this training. I'd love to see it again at the library so I could encourage other caregivers to attend. As a Girl Scout leader, I was also wondering if this could be a course for the other Girl Scout leaders of Peters Township? Thank you so much for this. You were wonderful."*
- *"As a firefighter and a member of the Mt. Lebanon community, we have the responsibility and the privilege to identify early warning signs of behavioral risks. The session with Outreach equipped us with the tools and resources to identify and address these risks. As a parent myself, I felt the impact Outreach is providing to the larger community of Mt. Lebanon that includes my children."*

The QPR Training has offered participants the language and tools to discuss suicide and behavioral risks in meaningful ways. First responders, community leaders, and parents who have been among the first to participate in the training have seen its value and have advocated for its continued use.

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<sup>6</sup> This feedback was offered to Outreach counselors at the time of the training, one of the first offered as part of the program. In response, QPR training is now the final element of any in-service training or program for staff members during the day, allowing the counselor adequate time to debrief with participants.



## Key Informant Interviews

Outreach provided contact information for nine potential interview subjects to the evaluation team at the onset of the project. Questions for the respondents were developed with the evaluation team, program manager, and executive director of Outreach. Prospective interview subjects were contacted up to three times. Six interviews were conducted between February and September 2023, each lasting between 30-45 minutes.<sup>7</sup>

Five of the six respondents are librarians and responsible for arranging programming for either the general population or for youth at their community library. A sixth respondent is the manager of business services at a local manufacturing facility.<sup>8</sup>

Interviews were conducted over Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Following transcription, responses were coded using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. Following this analysis, several themes emerged from the interviews.

**Respondents saw the need for programs offered by Outreach.** Every respondent described how programs were introduced and developed at their organization. In several cases, front line staff learned funding was available to provide Outreach programming and chose from an array of options. Others developed tailored programming for their institution, based upon the needs they expressed to the Program Manager. Respondents reported they were challenged by a need in their community or workplace that they were not equipped to provide or had resources to provide for within the organization. The opportunity to provide such programming from Outreach was welcome.

- *“So, we knew we wanted to work with folks that were mental health professionals, because we know, just from having the kids coming in and the stuff that you overhear or the stuff they talk to you about, and the stuff that they're dealing with. And it's also the financial [challenge], not everybody's family is going to be able to afford to send them to therapy, or maybe their health insurance doesn't cover it. Just having a space to kind of normalize, discussing mental health was something that my supervisor and I were saying was important to kind of create that foundation with the kids.”*
- *“I have the ability to maybe have the closest pulse check on all layers of employees. So, I'm really kick-starting the idea of conversations based on my knowledge of the employee base at the time. I know burnout is a big one right now with our professional*

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<sup>7</sup> The Program Manager reported the three subjects who did not respond to requests for an interview had not yet fully engaged with Outreach programming.

<sup>8</sup> As a private institution, the company paid for the programming provided by Outreach. The inclusion of the interview allowed for additional feedback about the reception of these programs in the region.

*services group. I know that we've had some parents who have lost children to suicide. I know that anxiety is crippling our millennial and Gen Z workforce. So, I have ...it's not the right word to say luxury, but I have the luxury of being close enough where I can come up with a lot of the programming. But I also am not an expert, so that's where I work with [Outreach]... It's a really cool group."*

- *"We did a survey to our patrons in the community, and a lot of them... [offered] suggestions [around] having mental health [support] for teens. For middle schoolers and everything like that. So, when we did the survey, then I met [the executive director], it like kind of clicked."*

Outreach Teen & Family Services  
184 followers  
Reposted from · 1mo · 🌐  
Congratulations to the team for their commitment to mental wellness in the workplace! We are honored to be your partners on this journey!  
#employeeewellness



*A private employer noted on LinkedIn (reposted by Outreach) their commitment to offering support for mental wellness for their employees.*

**Some respondents chose from a pre-existing array of programming.** Outreach had sent available programming to potential community partners. As several respondents described, the topics resonated with the needs in their community.

- *"I looked at the list online that was sent to us via a brochure, chose the ones that I thought would be best received from our teen audience or the most needed, and I set those up. And ours is actually running currently. So, we have six weekly sessions. We're meeting Monday afternoons with a program that's just called 'Talk It Out.'"*
- *"I emailed the contact [at Outreach] and then they emailed me back [with their program options]. I believe it was like a PDF brochure. Of all the different ones that are offered. And I picked a couple that looked interesting, I believe, three. And we scheduled them for the summer. We had the first one last week. It was an event on bullying, how to prevent and deal with bullying."*

**Respondents appreciated how well Outreach could tailor programming to their specific needs.**

Other respondents wanted or required specific topics for their constituency.

- *"[The counselor] is a rock star. ... I would be willing to tailor all of my events around her specialties. The way that she's able to connect with an audience is pretty impressive."*
- *"Each week we would sort of touch on a different theme and then, I suggested to her that since we were doing ... three-week sessions, I suggested that, maybe she'd only want to*

*do one theme and sort of delve into that more deeply over the three-week period. So that's what she's done the last couple times."*

**Outreach programs have been well received by participants.** Anecdotal accounts from the interview subjects indicated that respondents (or in some cases, their parents) report positive experiences with the programs that Outreach provides.

- *"I would love to have them back, if not for that same program, maybe for something similar. Attendance throughout the school year, especially with teens, is a little harder to get. Like our numbers are always a little bit lower during the school year just because kids are so busy."*
- *"I think, around wellness ... you may not always hear the feedback. When it comes to wellness and people's mental health, people aren't always going to speak up and be like, 'Hey, my mental health is awful.' So, I think you just have to... In my opinion, it can't be a results-driven program. You have to just intentionally do this."*
- *"You get the feedback from the kids, and we did have sort of like a core group of kids that really liked the program like that fourth and fifth grade. So, they would tell their parents that they liked it and then the parents would ask us, 'Oh, are you going to do it again? Is there another session?' That sort of thing."*
- *"Well, when [the counselor is] not there, they ask me where the anxiety lady is... They have a connection with her. They like her. I think she's a good fit for the age group that I have. I think the kids have given me positive feedback. They like the snacks, they like [her] as a person."*

**While most would like to see higher rates of participation at the programs, respondents expressed satisfaction with the numbers of participants.** They recognized that fluctuations in the time of year and the sensitivity of the topics have had an influence on attendance and participation.

The screenshot shows a registration window with the following text:

**FAMILY TALK: LISTENING WITHOUT JUDGMENT**

As a part of the local community for more than 40 years, Outreach Teen & Family Services provides counseling services and programs to support the mental health needs of youth in the South Hills of Pittsburgh. Our focus is one of empowerment, prevention, education and early intervention. In the 1 hour presentation, families will learn how to listen without judgement to improve connection and understanding with their children.

**Date:**  
Thursday Sep 28, 2023

**Time:**  
6:30 PM

[Register](#) There are many spaces available.

[ [CLOSE THIS WINDOW](#) ]

*One community partner markets Outreach and suggests patrons sign up for sessions on their website.*

- *"I would like to get the attendance higher, that's the one thing. And we haven't... I think we had more kids during the school year. We haven't had as many participants over the summer. And sometimes you just never know who you're going to... Who you're going to get. But I mean, in general, I would like to get more kids on board."*
- *"I would say I'm moderately satisfied with how many people [attend events], I just would always think all library programs could have more people at them."*
- *"We just found with kind of parenting things, maybe kind of some of the sensitive kind of topics, anywhere over five as long as we don't have to cancel it, we get a couple. We're pretty happy... I know that whenever we posted it on Instagram, we got a lot of likes for the program, so I think a lot of people like the idea of an anti-bullying program. Which is just, I think something that should be offered and that we're proud to kind of offer it."*

**Other staff and managers at their institutions are aware of the programs and promote them.**

- *"Our president, definitely pedals it in his conversations, has me in all of his town halls. So, it's definitely a priority that comes out of his mouth."*
- *"I'd say staff have a pretty good idea of when stuff is happening. Like I do make sure that like... I mean, I'm in my own little world back here, but I do make sure that like the kid's desk and the reference desk, and the front desk all have like my monthly event schedule."*

**Outreach programs are marketed to the larger community (or within the private company) through social media, websites, email blasts, flyers, community magazines, event calendars, and word-of-mouth.**

- *"Some libraries are fortunate enough to have their own marketing department. We do not. So, we create our own flyers, and we certainly post flyers in and around the library, and we'll post those same flyers to our social media sites and advertise that way."*

**Respondents were able to identify ways Outreach programming had broader impacts for their institutions.**

- *"It looks good to our clients. And from our prospective candidates, it's few and far between these days where you can tout a pretty robust wellness program that offers mental, physical, and financial wellness programming throughout the year, free of charge. We take our employees paddle boarding with public lands, for free. We offer financial wellness coaching for free. That's 12 free wellness programming events a year."*

- *"I like that we are offering them... I can't think of any other nonprofit or group that offers these types of talks for parents. ...And I don't know if you're familiar with something called PA Forward, it's a library initiative with the state of Pennsylvania. For libraries to participate in this STAR Program, we have to offer a variety of programs on these literacies. And having been able to offer these programs helped us complete our Gold Star initiative for the year. So, in a way that benefited the library, because we were able to refer to this as a partnership, we were proud to complete this social literacy to help us get our PA Forward Gold Star. So that helped us."*

After describing how the Outreach program manager assisted during a particular instance with a patron, one librarian said,

- *"I mean, it would be great if we had somebody like [the Outreach counselor] all the time after school, because we're dealing with all kinds of kids, all kinds of social issues, and yeah. Everything, I mean, we're basically school without teachers after school."*

**Respondents appreciate their ability to refer to Outreach as a community resource.**

- *"I think anytime you can make a new community partnership make, that connection, it's so beneficial...Knowing that if I do run into a family who I'm speaking with, that brings up some sort of problem, whether it be depression or bullying or whatever it may be. At least I have that resource to go to, 'Hey, let me put you in touch with so and so from...'"*

Outreach counselors have also provided resources of other agencies in neighboring counties when appropriate and needed, depending on the locale of the institution.

**Respondents anticipate budgeting for programming in the future, with the caveat that they face limited resources.**

- *"The topics are very important topics. So, for me, that would be worthwhile spending."*

**All of the respondents felt their institutions were well equipped to host Outreach programs in their space.** One respondent suggested they could enhance the programming by providing additional library resources (books, videos, other materials) given enough notice to pull the materials together in advance of the program. They would also like to have more staff available to assist with programming.

**No respondent was able to identify any challenges in working with Outreach.**

**Working with Outreach has proven to be a smooth collaboration for these institutions.**

- *"Seamless. It's all been over email, but we get the responses right away. If I do have a question, for instance, I have to move them from the program room this week into the*

*study room, just because we had a conflict and within hours, I got a response. So, on my end at least, it's been very, very easy."*

- *"It's been very professional on my end. Just answer any questions. The presenters came on time and really smoothly, I think. Yeah. Perfect."*

**Each respondent was asked to describe Outreach to someone who was not familiar with the agency.**

- *"I should probably start with their name. They offer family and teen services, and they have an array of offerings, resources, capabilities, certifications... What's the word? Clinical professionals. The services are... There's so many of them. That was the coolest thing to me. And then I would tell them that what I've learned through my work with them is that their services expand beyond just that space. ... They can do it all. **They're really a Swiss army knife.**"*
- *"**They're a helping hand.**"*
- *"An opportunity to meet with a professional who specializes in parenting relationships. It'd be **a great place to start** if you just have questions, or you're not sure where to go. These people are professionals and that we can trust."*
- *"**Approachable professionals**, right? The fact that they are so laid back and easy to talk to, I think, is extremely important when we're dealing with these types of topics. So, I would say yes, they are professional, and they are experienced, and they can help you, but they're very approachable."*
- *"They're **a mental health resource** for the South Hills in general, but specifically, they work with kids and teens and if you are having... You have an interest in doing events with kids and teens or with parents that revolve around child mental health, that they would be someone that will be **very responsive.**"*
- *"They are **a community counseling resource**. That it's a team of therapists and that you can sign up for individual therapy. And they also, I know they have podcasts. I'm pretty sure that they do outreach to the schools, at least to the high school, probably the middle schools."*

## Key Accomplishments and Challenges

### Key Accomplishments

1. Outreach has improved its capacity to gather feedback about each program following each presentation.
2. Outreach provides programming content that is valued by participants. In the QPR Post-Program Survey completed by 23 respondents between September 2022 and June 2023, all but one gave their experience with the training a "5" or a "4" on a scale of "5" to "1" with "5" being the highest.
3. Respondents view the Outreach counselors and program presenters as professional, organized, empathetic, and approachable. They value the connection they are able to form with the participants, whether participants are youth or adults.
4. Community partners value the available programming offered by Outreach: both the programs that have been developed and the tailored elements that counselors and administrators have been willing to offer based upon the specific needs of the organization.
5. Outreach has demonstrated it is a learning organization. Staff and administrators use the feedback they receive from partners, from surveys or elsewhere to adjust their programs and ensure they meet the needs of their community and constituencies.

### Key Challenges

- While some organizations have sufficient funding to support programs from an external provider, others reported they value the programs but have difficulty stretching their budget to include these programs. Depending upon the resources of the particular community, sustainable funding from the community partners themselves may prove challenging.
- The stigma about mental health discussions, while lessening, is still present. Once participants are in the door, the programs are well received. Marketing and including more people will be a continuing challenge.
- Needs for support for mental health services and mental health information are rising. Community partners provided examples of how they could feel the impact of mental health struggles at their institutions and welcomed the programming Outreach was able to provide.

## Conclusion

Outreach Teen & Family Services, Inc. is a learning organization. Its commitment to capacity building in evaluation is demonstrated by developing and using surveys and feedback over the course of the past year (2023) to understand participants' experience of their programs. Outreach conducted two surveys, QPR and Mental Health 101, in the past four months, with the expectation of expanding their use.

Outreach plays a significant role in promoting mental health, setting the stage for healthy discussions about mental wellness and offering guidance about suicide prevention throughout the South Hills. It offers resources and programs and has become a trusted partner for individuals and institutions.

In final remarks, one interview respondent closed by saying, "I wish our community could have their own Outreach. But being able to be in the South Hills, having them so close and being able to communicate with them and them willing to work with us, that's what's great about it."