

# Healthy Relationships - Fiscal Year 2023

Erica Ritsema, MSW

[Eritsema@MissoulaCounty.US](mailto:Eritsema@MissoulaCounty.US)



The Healthy Relationships Project at the Missoula City-County Health Department works to promote healthy relationships and prevent relationship violence, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and teen dating violence. We offer outreach and education to help people learn skills for having healthier relationships. We also coordinate Make your Move! Missoula, a coalition of local organizations and community members engaged in efforts to change the social norms, beliefs, and behaviors that support sexual and intimate partner violence, thus creating a safer and healthier community.

## Program Background

### Evidence Base, methodology and/or best practices model

The Healthy Relationships program utilizes technical packages from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including [STOP SV](#) and [Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan](#). Strategies that we use from these technical packages include:

- Promoting social norms that protect against violence, including promoting positive bystander approaches.
- Teaching skills to prevent sexual violence, including promoting social-emotional learning, teaching healthy dating and intimate relationship skills to adolescents, and promoting healthy sexuality.
- Creating protective environments, including promoting model sexual harassment policies and addressing community-level risk and protective factors.

## Program Highlights

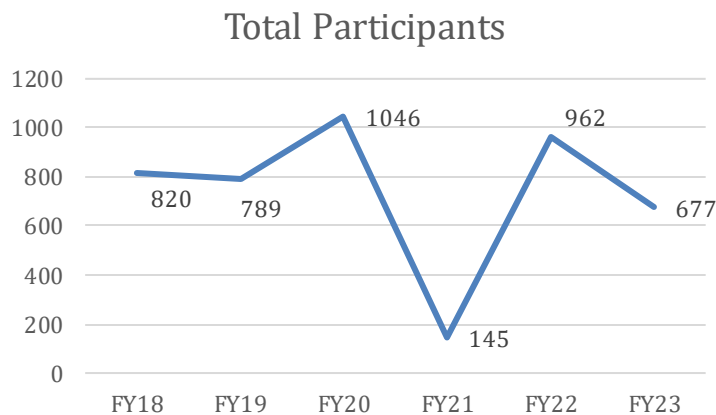
Some highlights from FY23 included:

- I closed out a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant that was done in collaboration with Missoula County's Community Justice Department. The grant was used to run a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) program during FY22. We were also able to give a subaward of approximately \$15,000 to Missoula County Public Schools to help them address teacher burnout, a community issue that was identified by the student's YPAR project.

- 677 people participated in relationship violence prevention, including:
  - 82 Elementary School Students
  - 471 Middle and High School Students
  - 52 Alcohol-Serving Staff
  - 72 Trail Crew Members
- I participated in Social Work Supervision training to bolster our division's ability to provide quality supervision to social work practicum students.
- For the second year in a row I tabled at Missoula Pride, engaging block party participants around the use of consent and healthy relationship skills. LGBTQ+ and especially bisexual women experience disproportionate rates of sexual and intimate partner violence, so Missoula Pride was a great opportunity to reach this target population.

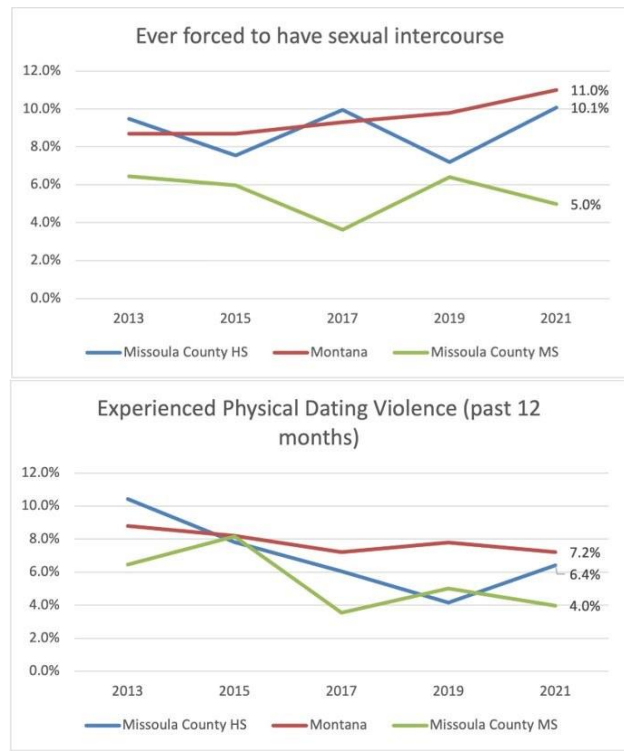


## The Numbers



The total number of participants reached during FY23 was lower compared to FY22 and pre-Pandemic levels. Due to an injury and parental leave, I was unable to deliver workshops and school lessons between November 2022 and early March 2023. I anticipate participant numbers will bounce back for FY24.

I utilize local Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data to track trends in relationship violence among youth in our community. Youth in Missoula experience rates of physical dating violence and sexual violence at rates slightly lower than youth in Montana. We saw a slight increase in these rates between 2019 and 2021. I am eager to see the 2023 data to see if this is a trend. Like many behavioral health issues, I am keeping an eye out for how the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic may be affecting rates of relationship violence.



## Evaluation & Lessons Learned

During FY23, I conducted a review of the Bar Workshop evaluation data from 2017 to 2022 to identify successes and opportunities for improvement. Some of the findings included:

- The workshops are having the biggest impact on bar staff's feelings of self-efficacy. After our workshop, 53.4% of participants rate feeling more confident engaging in positive bystander behaviors to prevent sexual violence.
- Nearly half of workshop participants rated their workplace culture positively on measures that support sexual violence prevention on the pre survey. This increased to 85.9% of participants on the post survey.
- There is some room for improvement on the Rape Myth Acceptance measures. Approximately 1 in 3 workshop participants experienced an improvement in their acceptance of rape myths after attending a workshop. However, this scale might not be sensitive enough post #MeToo to overcome a potential social desirability bias.
- I have also been looking for alternative evaluation techniques to use for the adult workshops I provide.

## **What's Next**

- Onboard new members and develop a strategic plan for the Make Your Move! Coalition
- Participate in the implementation of the SPACECAT strategic plan to help address risk and protective factors shared by health promotions programs.
- Develop more age-appropriate healthy relationship lessons for elementary school students and expand offerings to after school programs.
- Complete Youth Behavioral Health Needs Assessment with the MCPS Student Wellness Council and Strategic Alliance for Improved Behavioral Health.

## **Partners**

- Missoula County Public Schools
- YWCA Missoula
- Student Advocacy Resource Center
- Blue Mountain Clinic
- Open Aid Alliance
- EmpowerMT

## **Interns**

This fiscal year I worked with Laila Mascarena, a Bachelor of Social Work student. Laila assisted me with delivering lessons to K-12 students, especially during my high school consent and healthy relationship lessons. She also assisted with Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April.