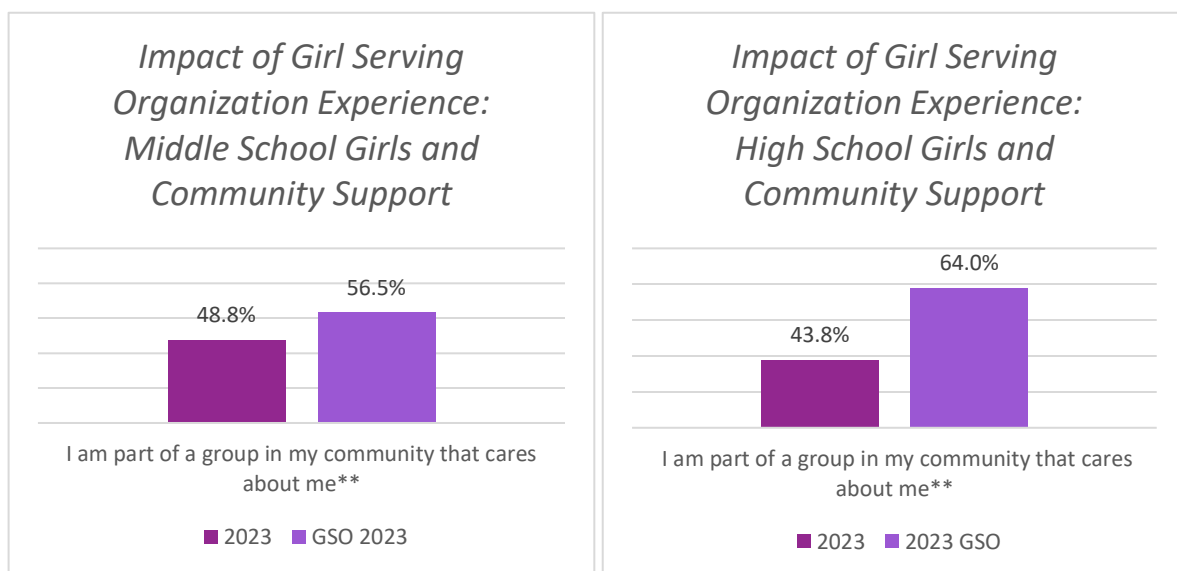




THE IMPACT OF GIRLS ONLY EXPERIENCES

Investing in Girls Alliance (IIGA) uses the Greater Worcester Regional Youth Health Survey data to measure risk factors^a in middle and high school girls. By contrasting the data of all middle/high school girls with those who participate in a gender specific girl serving organization experience, IIGA measures the protective factors^b gained from that experience – the positive impacts of the girls-only experience(s). Middle and high school girls who participate in these experiences offered by a girl serving organization^c (GSO) show more protective factors against the risks and challenges of middle and high school than their peers who lack girls-only experiences. These protective factors gained through these experiences ensure they thrive in adolescence and into adulthood, becoming engaged members of the Worcester community as young adults.

Research shows that "community engagement is a fundamental component of mental wellness, acting as a vital shield against stressors, and allowing girls to thrive emotionally and psychologically."¹ Participation in a girls-serving organization within greater Worcester provides that support to girls. Middle school girls participating in a girl serving organization experience are more than 7% more likely to say they are part of a community that cares about them. Among high school girls, GSO girls are more than 20% more likely to report being part of a community that cares about them. This increase over time may be attributed to the compounded effect of multiple experiences over time, which aligns with research citing "the powerful influence of collaborative efforts within communities"¹, much as we see in the alliance of the girl serving organizations within greater Worcester.



^aRisk factors are those factors which increase the likelihood of negative outcomes

^bProtective factors are those factors which give support or insulation against negative risk factors.

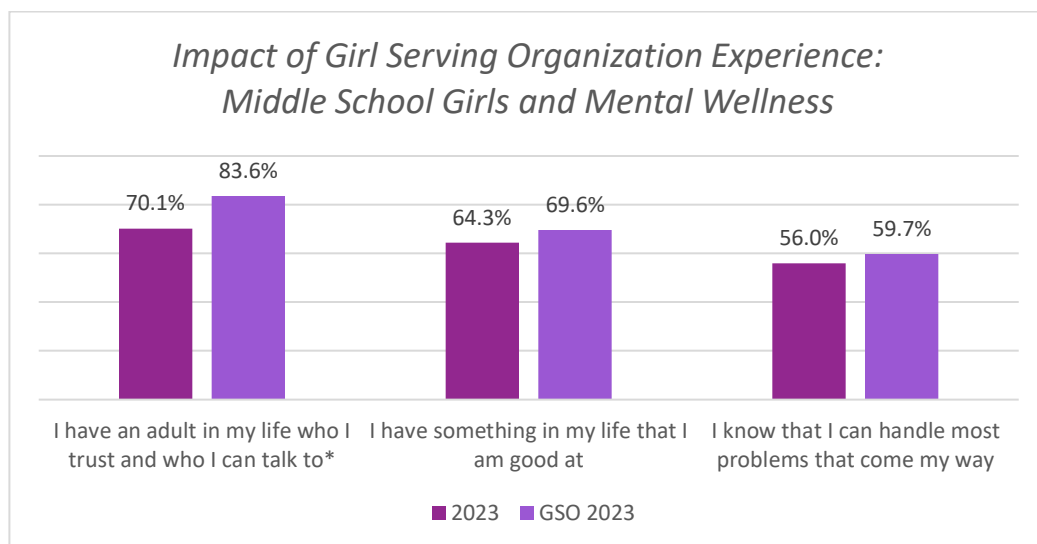
^cA girl serving organization (GSO) serves girls in environments that are girls only, and uses gender informed best practices to deliver programs for groups or individual girls.

*Results between girls at large and GSO girls are statistically significant at $p < .10$

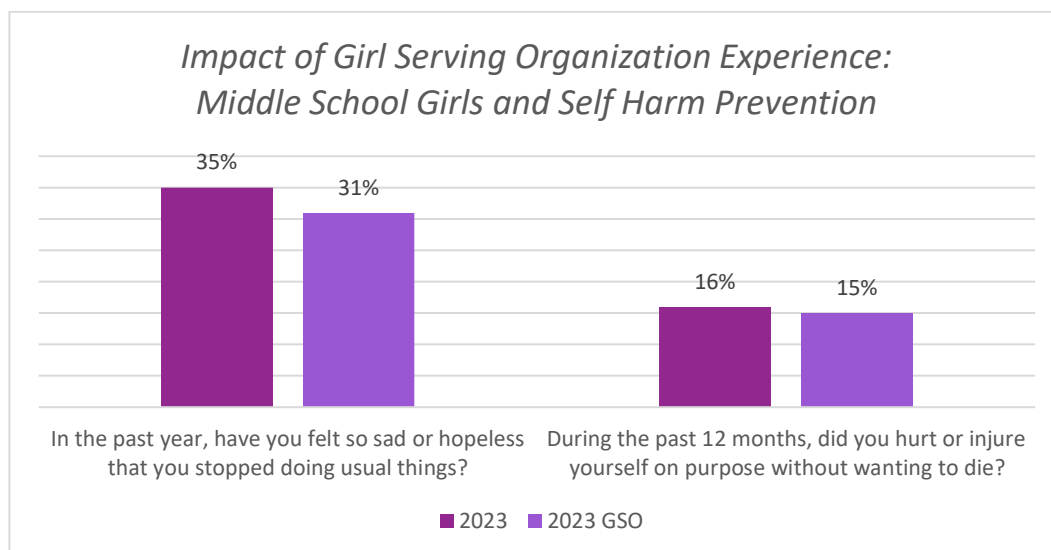
**Results between girls at large and GSO girls are statistically significant at $p < .01$

MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS

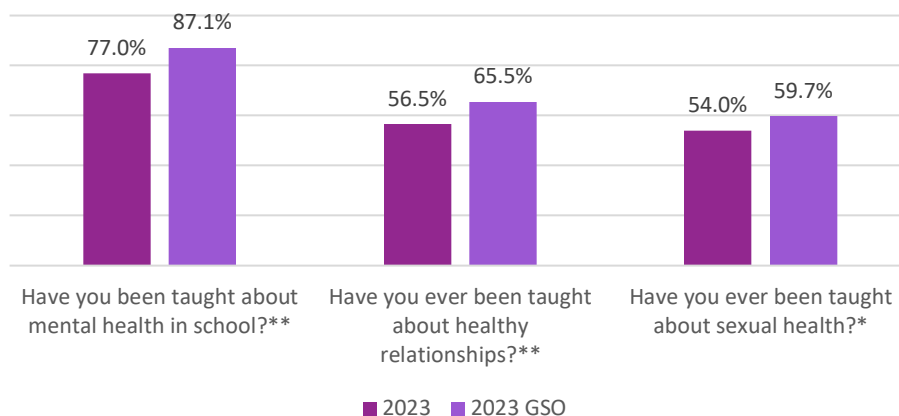
GSOs are leaders in positive mental health and suicide prevention for middle and high school girls. Middle school girls participating in a GSO are more likely to say they have an adult they trust and can talk to in their lives. Further, they demonstrate more confidence in having a skill they are good at and managing life's problems.



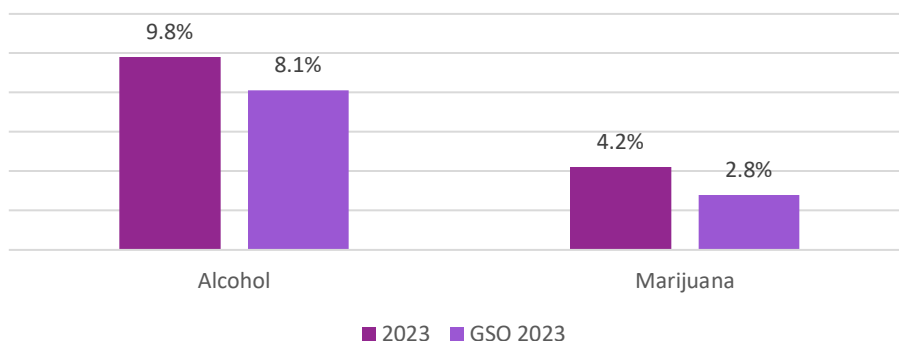
GSOs are pivotal to both reducing risk factors^a that lead to self-harm and providing protective factors^b in mental health, sexual health, and healthy relationships.



Impact of Girl Serving Organization Experience: Middle School Girls and Protective Factors

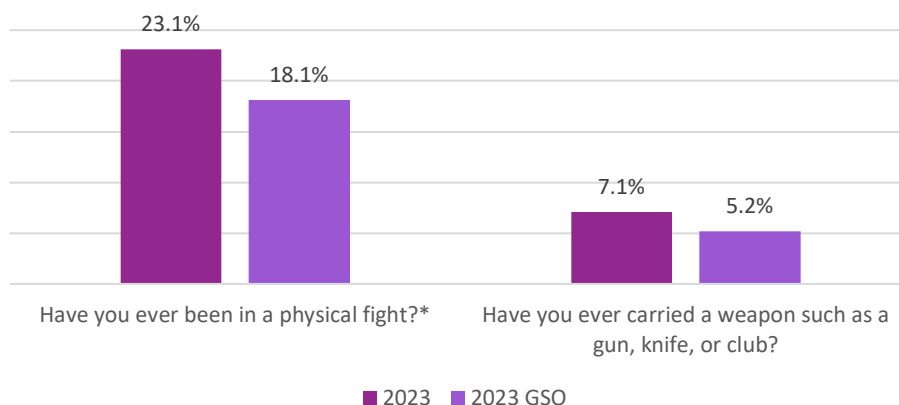


Impact of Girl Serving Organization Experience: Middle School Girls and Substance Misuse



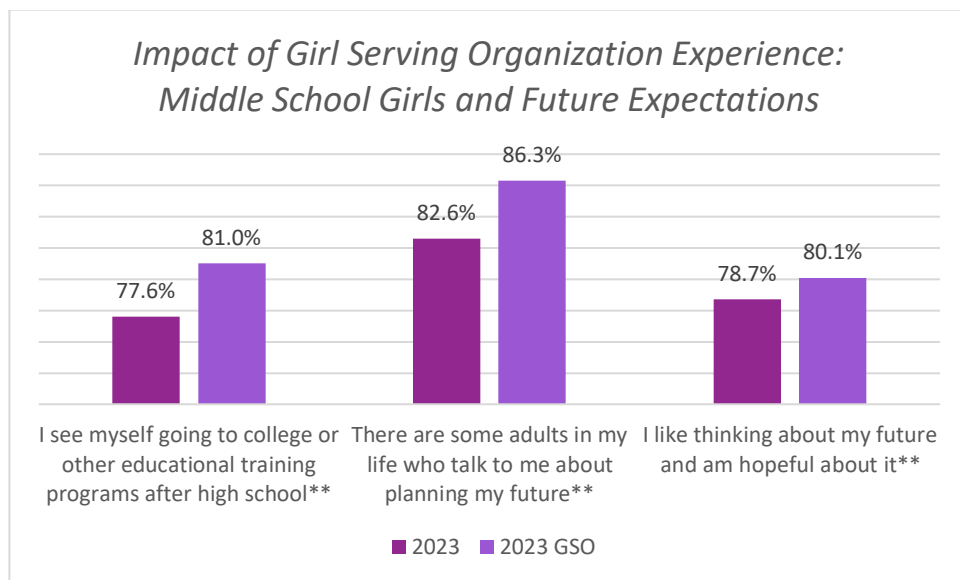
Middle school girls participating in a GSO are less likely to use alcohol or marijuana.

Impact of Girl Serving Organization Experience: Middle School Girls and Personal Safety



Middle school girls participating in a GSO are less likely to have been in a physical fight or to carry a weapon.

Middle school girls engaged in a GSO are more hopeful about a positive future overall. Specifically, they are more likely to have adults who talk to them about planning for the future. Finally, they are more likely to see themselves continuing their learning (college, educational training programs) after high school than are their middle school peers.

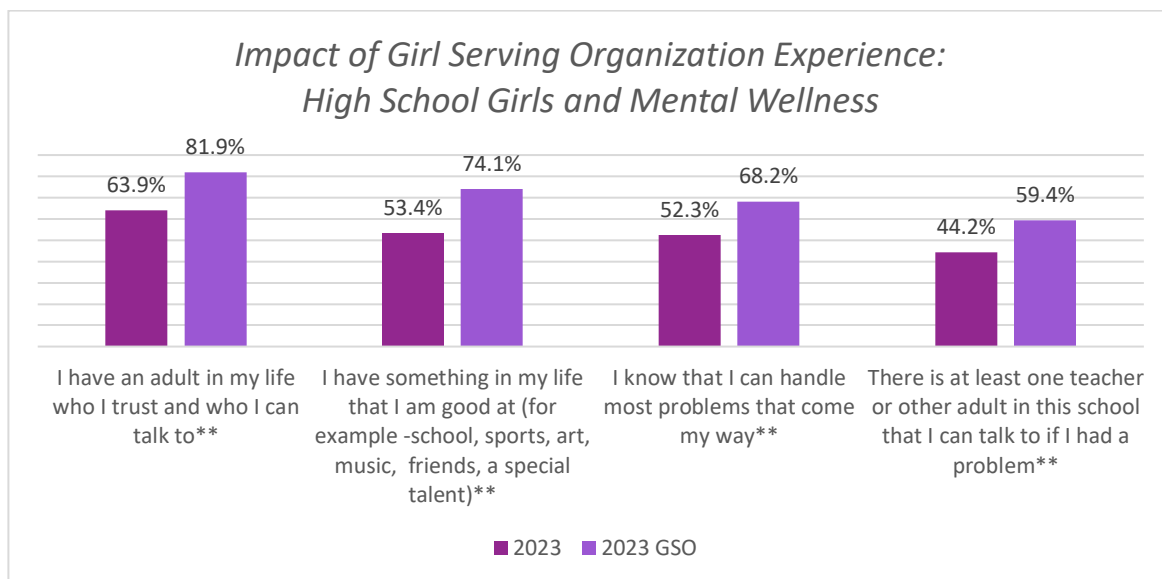


HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

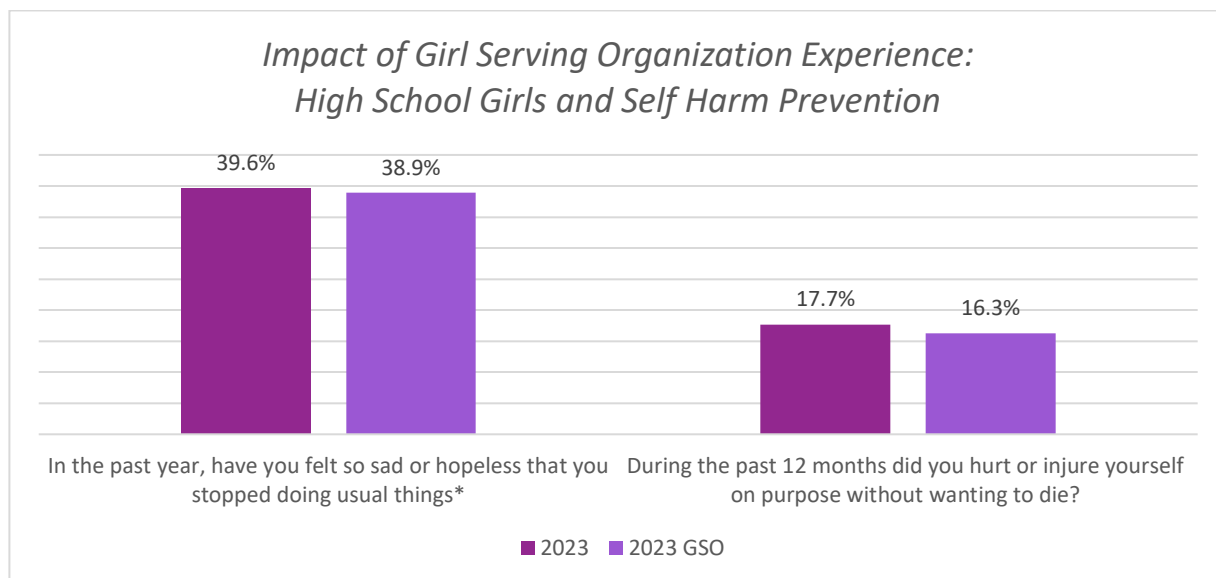
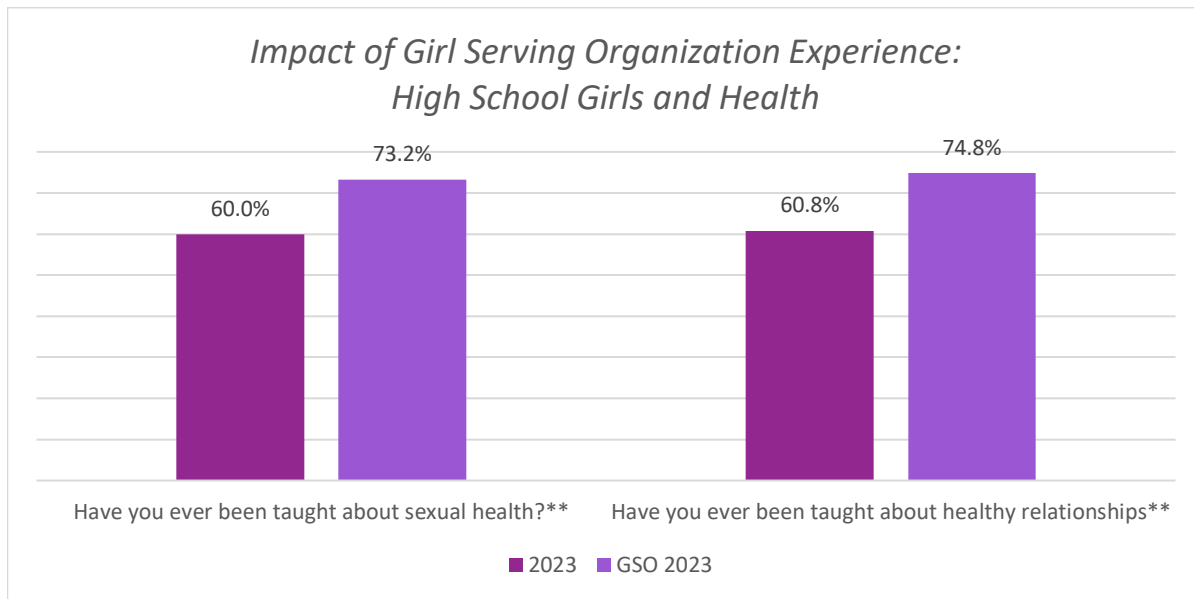
The impact of a GSO experience is compounded in girls who have had multiple girl serving organization experiences, whether those experiences happened over time (multiple years) or concurrently (participation in two or more GSOs during the same year). Girls with multiple GSO experiences have the highest confidence overall compared with their non-GSO peers². Current data shows the long-term impact of GSO experiences for high school girls in greater Worcester.

Nearly 40% of high school girls regularly report feelings of sadness or hopelessness. As a protective factor against that, 82% of girls in GSOs report having supportive adults they can turn to and who will listen to them, compared to just 63% of girls not in GSOs.

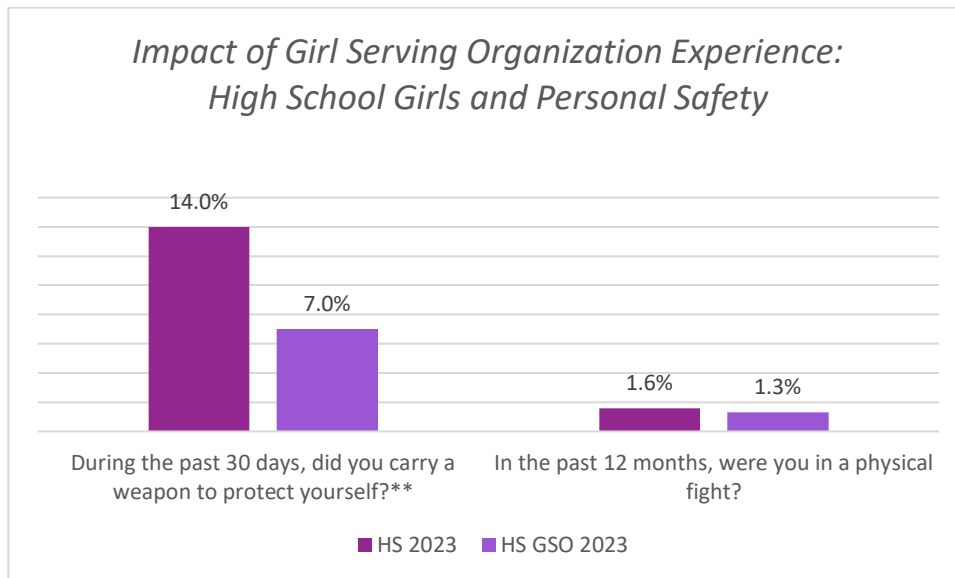
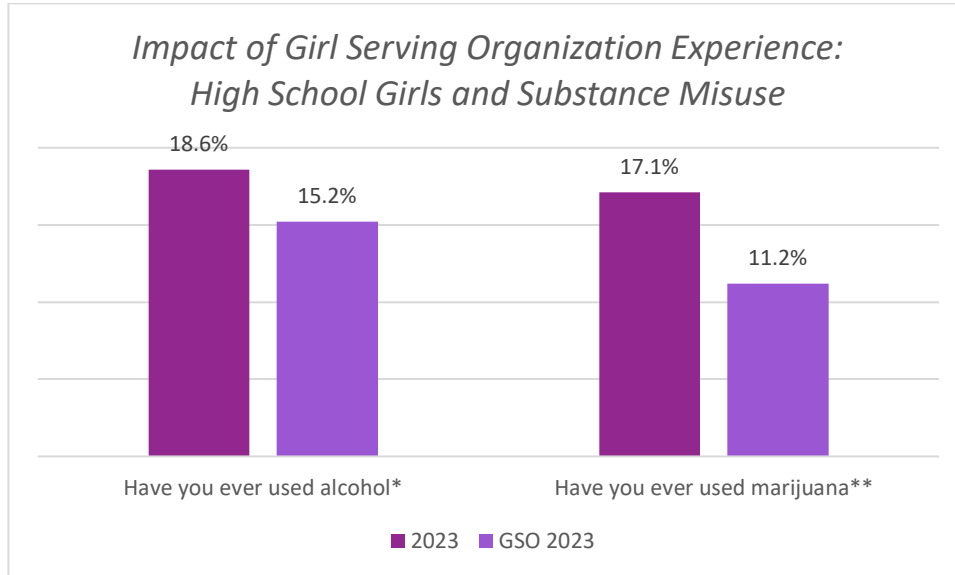
In 2023, 1 in 7 high school girls have seriously considered suicide. High school girls involved in GSOs are much more likely than their peers to express positive protective factors, including being part of a community that cares about them, having adults they feel they can turn to for support, and feelings of confidence that they can handle problems that come their way.



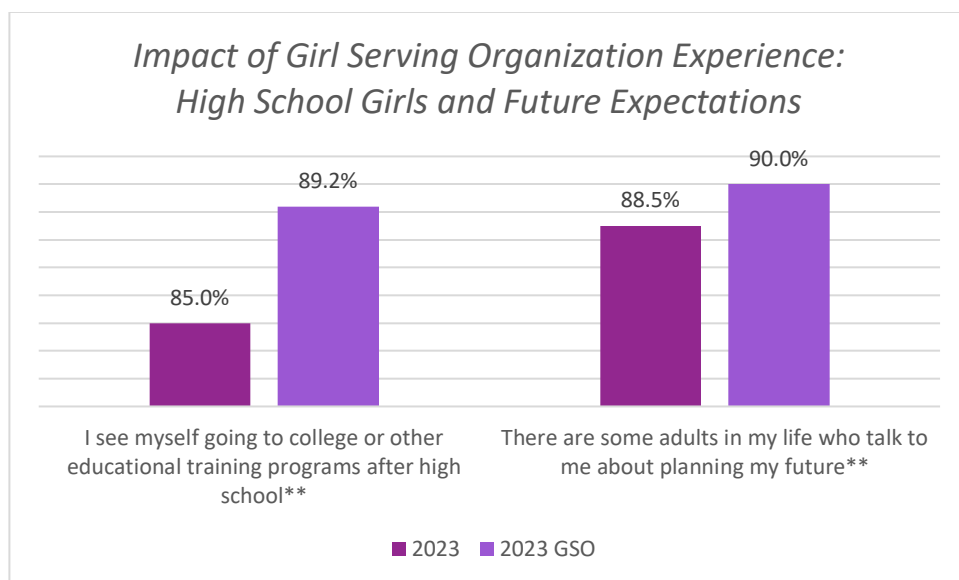
Additionally, high school girls in a GSO are more likely than their high school peers to report the protective factors of being taught about sexual health and healthy relationships, and less likely to report risk factors for depression or suicidality.



High school girls with a GSO experience are less likely to use alcohol or marijuana and are less likely to have carried a weapon or been in a physical fight than their peers.



Finally, high school girls engaged in GSO experiences are more likely to report positive future aspirations, have adults who talk about their futures with them, and see themselves continuing their education post high school.



Conclusion and Call to Action

Based on this data, there is no doubt that girls who participate in a girl serving organization in middle school gain protective factors and carry them from that time into the future. While each girl serving organization is unique in its mission and delivery models, every organization focusing on girls-only spaces and gender informed best practices within its curriculum impacts its girls immediately and for their future.

Each GSO is challenged to use its mission, goals, and qualitative examples to create organization specific talking points which promote the value and impact of their program for middle and high school girls.

Consider these questions:

Why should middle and high school girls participate in a GSO?

Why should funders support GSOs serving middle and high school girls?

Why should communities of leadership support GSOs serving middle and high school girls?

Footnotes:

^aRisk factors are those factors which increase the likelihood of negative outcomes

^bProtective factors are those factors which give support or insulation against negative risk factors.

^cA girl serving organization (GSO) serves girls in environments that are girls only, and uses gender informed best practices to deliver programs for groups or individual girls.

*Results between girls at large and GSO girls are statistically significant at $p < .10$

**Results between girls at large and GSO girls are statistically significant at $p < .01$

References

1. Taliana, L., *The Role of Community Engagement in Promoting Mental Wellness*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (2023): Interdisciplinary Journal Papier Human Review. Downloaded from:
<https://www.igsspublication.com/index.php/ijphr/article/view/267>

2. Shapiro, M., Martin, K., Grossman, D., Deyton, P., Hammer, D., Walleaser, L. Dreaming Big: Examining the Career Aspirations of Girls of Color, Simmons College CGO. Downloaded from:
<https://www.simmons.edu/sites/default/files/2021-12/CGO-Insights-40.pdf>

Data set

Survey: Greater Worcester Regional Youth Health Survey (GWRYHS)
Includes: Grafton, Millbury, Leicester, Shrewsbury, and Worcester

Middle School (2021): 2207 identify as female; 386 participate in a GSO (17%)

Middle School (2023): 2002 identify as female; 536 participate in a GSO (26%)

High School (2021): 4276 identify as female; 646 participate in a GSO (15.1%)

High School (2023): 3814 identify as female; 717 participate in a GSO (18.7%)