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Child Abuse Prevention Education Strengths and Needs Assessment

River Bridge Regional Center | Garfield County, CO

River Bridge Regional Center Child Abuse Prevention Education Strengths and Needs Assessment

Garfield County, CO

Acknowledgements

River Bridge and Omni would like to thank the various members of the vested partner group as well as those who participated in the data collection for their collaboration and key insights into the community.

River Bridge would like to give a special thank you to River Bridge's Board of Directors, Phil Long Glenwood Spring Subaru and their Share the Love Event, and the Giving Network for the financial support for this Needs Assessment. Their support will help strengthen child abuse awareness and education in Garfield County in the years to come.



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Introduction Letter for Community Needs Assessment



Dear Community Partners, Stakeholders, and Supporters,

At River Bridge Regional Center, our mission has always been to protect, support, and advocate for children and families impacted by abuse, providing a safe, child-centered response when abuse occurs. Today, we are expanding that mission by proactively shifting from response to prevention, because protecting children begins long before abuse happens.

This Community Needs Assessment was launched in response to the urgent need for stronger child abuse prevention efforts. As abuse continues to affect children and families across all demographics and communities, we believe prevention must become as central to our work as intervention. In alignment with the National Children's Alliance's new Standards for Accreditation, including the optional standard in Child Abuse Prevention Education, we are taking a meaningful step toward building a safer future for our children.

We hope this report serves as a useful, community-tailored resource, one that is accessible, adaptable, and able to evolve as needs change. We also want to acknowledge and honor the important work already happening in our community. Many organizations and partners are doing incredible work to nurture healthy children and strong families. This project is not about reinventing or duplicating efforts; it is about breaking down silos, amplifying strengths, and collaborating to ensure that messaging and resources are consistent, aligned, and as impactful as possible.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who participated in this assessment, sharing their experiences and lending their time and expertise. We also extend our sincere thanks to the team at Omni for guiding us throughout the process, from clarifying our goals and developing survey questions to analyzing the data and preparing the final report and presentation.

Child abuse prevention is possible when communities unite. We invite you to join us in building a future where children are safe, families are strong, and every adult feels empowered to protect the children in their lives. Together, we can make prevention not only possible, but powerful.

With gratitude and commitment,

Amy Gomez

Mental Health Therapist & Prevention Coordinator

Mary Cloud

Development Director

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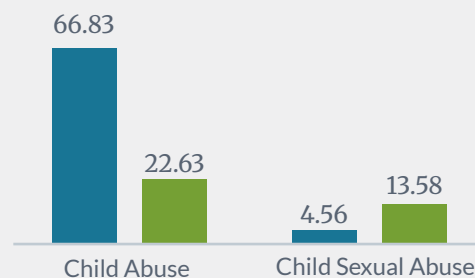


Executive Summary

Child abuse is a serious issue that impacts many families in Colorado. Prevention of child abuse requires a responsive support system, and a well-educated community that seeks to support those impacted by abuse. River Bridge Regional Center (River Bridge) is an organization based in Garfield County, Colorado that provides collaborative services to child abuse victims, their non-offending family members, and the community.

To strengthen the community and their own educational offerings, River Bridge is seeking to meet the National Children's Alliance's (NCA) child abuse prevention standards which requires completion of a Strengths and Needs Assessment. River Bridge partnered with Omni Institute to conduct an in-depth Strengths and Needs Assessment of the current child abuse prevention education efforts in Garfield County.

In 2024, **Garfield County** had a much higher rate of substantiated child sexual abuse cases (per 10,000 children) than **Colorado overall**.



Substantiated cases refer to cases where sufficient evidence is available to determine that the case occurred.

A wide range of partner organizations participated in data collection which included



81

Survey Responses



7

Key Informant Interviews

Participants shared key information that can be used to strengthen River Bridge's educational plan, including:

1

Strengths of the Current Prevention Education Offerings

2

Gaps in the Current Prevention Education Offerings

3

Communities/ Partners in Need of Further Education

4

Barriers to Implementing Prevention Education

Strengths

- Strong base for child/family services and training
- Partners are committed to collaboration and ongoing learning

Gaps

- Families and providers need more education on internet safety, grooming, consent, and gender/sexuality development
- Service providers need deeper training in trauma-informed practices and response protocols

Communities/Partners

- Partners and community members have unique educational needs tied to their everyday activities and roles
- Future prevention education efforts must be approachable to partners and the broader community, emphasizing ways to meet them where they are

Barriers

- Lack of time is the greatest barrier for partners to participate in child abuse prevention education
- A lack of awareness of resources was seen as the greatest barrier when it comes to the community's engagement with child abuse prevention education

River Bridge Welcomes Everyone to Get Involved!

Help River Bridge advance the education plan's goal of partnering with local organizations to protect children, strengthen families, and foster a more well-educated Garfield County. Partners can address gaps and build upon community strengths by engaging in these actions:



Increase Collaboration

Strengthen Garfield County's existing services by collaborating on new efforts and working together to promote trainings, events, and programming across organizations.



Connect Families to Services and Resources

Offer bilingual and hybrid training, along with culturally validating resources to connect families who are in need with prevention resources.



Advocate with Schools and Local Organizations

Partner with River Bridge to collaborate with schools and local organizations to strengthen child abuse prevention education in critical settings.



Raise Public Awareness

Co-host events, run joint campaigns, and share resources through local agencies and organizations to keep child abuse prevention visible and approachable.



Introduction

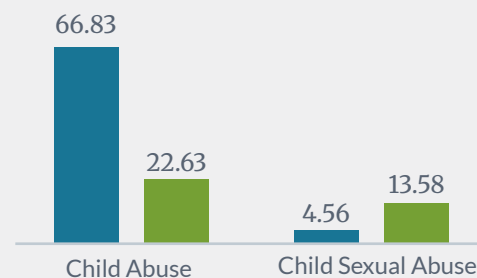
Child abuse is a serious issue that affects a wide segment of the American population and includes, but is not limited to, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect. Experiencing abuse at a young age can lead to serious negative impacts later in life, such as mental health conditions, substance use, repeat victimization, and more. Preventing child abuse requires an understanding of the risk/protective factors for child abuse, a responsive support system, and a well-educated community that seeks to support those impacted by abuse.

River Bridge Regional Center (River Bridge) is an organization based in Garfield County, Colorado that provides collaborative services to child abuse victims, their non-offending family members, and the community by developing a supportive environment that centers the needs of the child. Central to River Bridge's approach is working with a multidisciplinary team consisting of law enforcement, child protection, district attorneys, mental/medical health professionals, advocates, and forensic interviewers to provide services supporting the child's path to healing. River Bridge also ensures that their community is well educated on the causes, signs, and protective/risk factors associated with child abuse.

River Bridge also serves the Eagle, Pitkin, and Rio Blanco Counties though this needs assessment focuses on Garfield County as it is the largest county in their service area. River Bridge uses a child-centered approach to addressing child abuse through a wide-range of services including family advocacy, forensic interviews, mental health services, medical care, and more.

To strengthen their education offerings, River Bridge is seeking to meet the National Children's Alliance's (NCA) child abuse prevention standards. The NCA's standards² require the organization to undergo several steps to ensure the greatest rigor in their child abuse prevention education approach. A key step to this process is conducting a Strengths and Needs Assessment of child abuse prevention education local to their service area.

In 2024, Garfield County had a much higher rate of substantiated child sexual abuse cases (per 10,000 children) than Colorado overall¹.



Substantiated cases refer to cases where sufficient evidence is available to determine that the case occurred.



¹ Colorado Department of Human Services (2025). Count of Maltreatment Allegations by Maltreatment Type. Retrieved from <https://colorado.rom.socwel.ku.edu/reports/244>

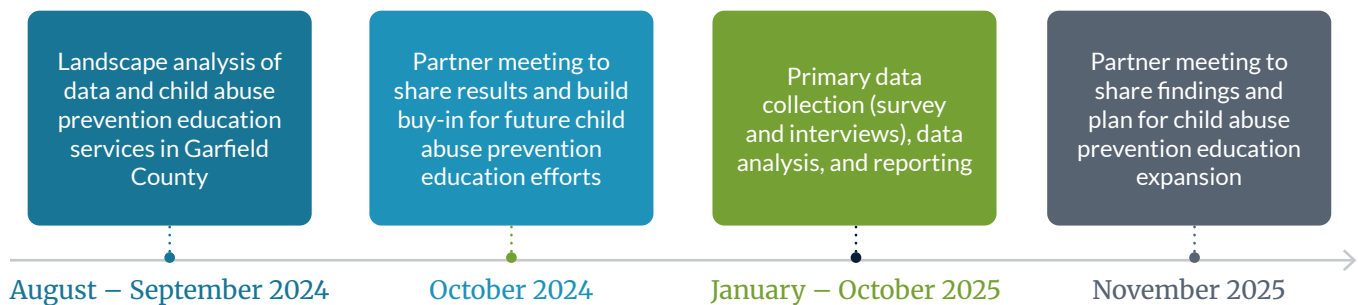
² National Children's Alliance. (2023). National Optional Standards of Accreditation for Children's Advocacy Centers: 2023 Edition. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2023-Optional-Standards-Book.pdf>.

As a means of achieving this standard, River Bridge partnered with Omni Institute (Omni), a nonprofit social science consultancy, to conduct a Strengths and Needs Assessment of the child abuse prevention education resources in Garfield County. This process (which started in August 2024 and completed in October 2025) involved an in-depth assessment of local and state data sources, interviews with key representatives of the child abuse systems of care, and facilitated discussions with River Bridge's vested partners. This report provides an overview of the results of the Strengths and Needs Assessment and charts future pathways for River Bridge's child abuse prevention education approach.

Strengths and Needs Assessment Methods

To ensure that River Bridge met the NCA's requirements under the child abuse prevention standard, they engaged in a Strengths and Needs Assessment that brought together a wide range of partners across Garfield County. A brief description of the timeline and each of the steps can be found below.

River Bridge's Strengths and Needs Assessment brought together a network of partners to identify needs and improve child abuse prevention education in Garfield County.



Landscape Analysis and Initial Vested Partner Meeting

To understand the landscape of available resources and gaps in prevention education, Omni collected publicly-available data related to child abuse occurrence within Garfield County and conducted a sweeping online assessment of educational resources available locally, regionally, statewide, and at the national level. The full landscape analysis can be accessed at <https://www.riverbridgerc.org/community-needs-assessment/>.

Omni then facilitated an initial kickoff meeting in October 2024 with River Bridge's vested partner group, which brought together representatives from a wide range of partners including public health, education, emergency response, medical/behavioral health, community outreach/services, and more. Initial results of the landscape analysis were presented, followed by an in-depth discussion around opportunities for participation in upcoming data collection efforts that would support River Bridge's child abuse prevention education plan and the community overall. The kickoff meeting led to the finalization of the research questions answered within this report.

Evaluation Questions

- 1 What are the strengths of the current child abuse prevention education resources in Garfield County?
- 2 What gaps exist in the current child abuse prevention education landscape in Garfield County?
- 3 Which communities/partners would benefit from increased child abuse prevention education in Garfield County?
- 4 What are the barriers related to implementing child abuse prevention education in Garfield County?



Data Collection Methods

In early 2025, Omni and River Bridge partnered to conduct a multi-method data collection that included a wide-range of providers who serve as a part of Garfield County’s child abuse system of care. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with representatives who are closely involved in serving Garfield County’s children and families.

Survey

Between January and March, 81 individuals completed a survey exploring a range of topics regarding strengths, barriers, and areas for improvement in Garfield County’s current child abuse prevention education offerings as well as perceived educational needs within organizations and the community. A breakdown of the survey responses by partner group can be found below.



Key Informant Interviews

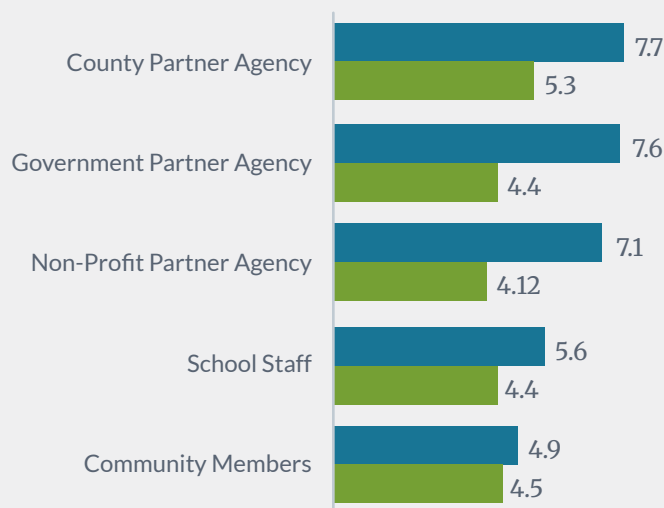
Omni also conducted 7 key informant interviews (KIIs) with individuals who serve children and families in Garfield County. To protect the anonymity of these individuals, their organizations are not provided, but participants represented local county partner agencies, schools, and non-profit partner agencies. Similar to the survey, participants were asked about their experiences with child abuse prevention education in Garfield County, as well as the strengths, gaps, and barriers to implementing child abuse prevention education within the county.

Findings from across the survey and KIIs were combined and are presented in the following sections.



Strengths of Garfield County's Current Prevention Education

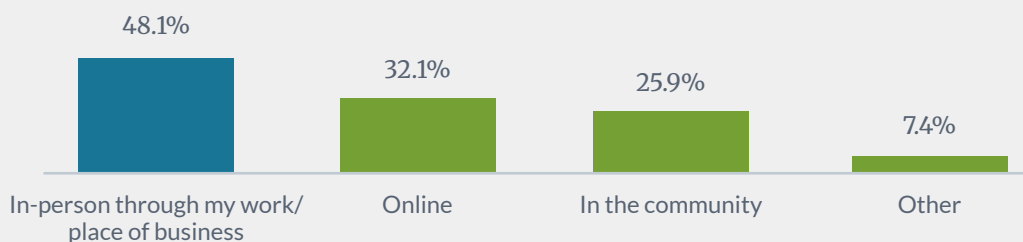
Survey and interview participants identified several strengths within Garfield County's current child abuse prevention education. Overall, findings show that, primarily through workplace trainings, professionals in Garfield County's child abuse system of care feel a general comfort in their understanding of child abuse, while there is room for growth when it comes to families in Garfield County.



On a scale of 1-10 (Not Well at All – Extremely Well), **service providers** generally feel well-educated about child abuse prevention and perceive that **families** are less well-educated on child abuse prevention in comparison.

This suggests that while professional environments may provide stronger access to prevention education, families in the broader community may not have the same level of exposure or resources.

Most frequently, respondents received child abuse prevention education **in-person through their workplace**.



Identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect was the most frequently provided child abuse prevention training topic for both service providers and families. Participants also felt that the topics most frequently presented were also the best understood within Garfield County.

52% Identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect

41% Trauma-informed approaches to working with children and families

36% Information on different types of abuse

The strengths identified through the survey were also reflected in the key informant interviews:



Strong Community Services Lay the Foundation for Improved Educational Access

Garfield County has a wide range of local agencies, schools, and youth-serving organizations that have developed a baseline understanding of child abuse in the community and have primed readiness to increase educational opportunities.



Mandatory Reporter Training has Fostered an Understanding of Response Processes

Agencies across Garfield County's child abuse system of care have received training on mandatory reporting, which has given a baseline understanding of the child abuse and reporting processes.



Holistic Family Support has Given Families Tools to Address Stress and Conflict

Several providers noted that they provide holistic training to families that centers on mindfulness to de-escalate conflict in homes, which can reduce the likelihood of child abuse.

Opportunities for Involvement

Formalize and strengthen interagency collaboration through formal agreements and shared goals to engage in the following:

- ✓ Ensure educational materials and presentations are culturally responsive for the various populations served.
- ✓ Exchange knowledge and enrich each other's programs by co-developing content and training.
- ✓ Engage in collective learning via collaborative storytelling or presenting at regularly scheduled meetings to build similar knowledge and skills.

“ I think that, probably more than ever, we have queued in professionals who feel empowered to both recognize and make the first steps in reporting abuse. So, I think that's much stronger than it has been. I think there's more types of professionals that feel empowered to do so, as far as not only social workers or clinicians, but also kind of frontline workers who might be in more just advocacy roles or supportive roles. There's more cross-collaboration between agencies and entities than I've seen before.”

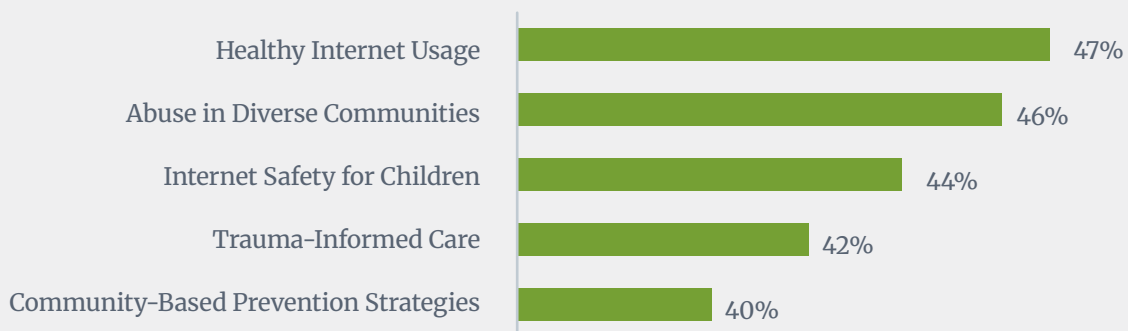
— Interview Participant



Current Gaps in Prevention Education

Although Garfield County has existing child abuse prevention education, there is room for growth. Participants in both the survey and the interviews shared what they believed to be the most needed educational resources for families and providers in Garfield County.

What Education Would be Helpful for Your Role as a Service Provider?



Healthy internet usage refers to education teaching youth how to balance internet usage with other social activities, while internet safety focuses on education about how youth can protect themselves online from harmful engagements and behaviors such as derogatory speech and sexting.

Survey participants noted **unique education needs** across Garfield County's different partner groups. These needs provide opportunities for River Bridge to tailor educational development to different populations.



County Partners (e.g., Family Services)

1. Online Sexual Exploitation
2. Internet Safety for Children
3. Abuse in Diverse Communities



Government Partners (e.g., Law Enforcement)

1. Abuse in Diverse Communities
2. Trauma-Informed Care
3. Internet Safety for Children



School Staff

1. Trauma-Informed Care
2. Community-Based Prevention Strategies
3. Identifying Different Forms of Abuse



Non-Profit Partners

1. Healthy Internet Usage
2. Internet Safety for Children
3. Online Sexual Exploitation

Training on proper responses and reporting practices for child abuse and trauma-informed practices in schools were also identified by interview participants as topics needed to support individuals in their role serving Garfield County's families. Although all of the participants received mandatory reporter training, they identified specific sub-topics that could support providers in responding to instances of child abuse disclosure. Further education in the below topics would provide individuals with a greater sense of comfort in reporting child abuse, decrease confusion, and strengthen the support for youth navigating difficult family situations.

Reporting and Response Training

- 1 Clear guidance on reporting procedures and laws
- 2 Best practices for early reporting
- 3 Techniques to communicate with youth about abuse
- 4 How to mentally prepare for and manage highly stressful situations

Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools

- 1 Training educators on trauma-informed approaches to behavior
- 2 Emphasizing care for the student and a focus on connecting them to support to address their traumatic experiences

Opportunities for Involvement

- ✓ Participate in specialized trainings and presentations River Bridge offers, such as Child Abuse 101 or Responding to Disclosure, as well as request follow-up guidance for specific questions or needs.
- ✓ Share ongoing educational needs with River Bridge to promote continuous education development.
- ✓ Share educational materials for school staff and administrators on trauma-informed practices to spark interest and lay the groundwork for future trainings.

“ They're a math teacher, that's what they know. They weren't trained on trauma-informed care or restorative practices. Or you know those types of language, and how to have a suicidal ideation conversation with a kid. And so, if there's an incident that happens and a behavior problem, they're excluding them and isolating them from the community.”

— Interview Participant

What Child Abuse Prevention Education Would be Helpful for Families in Garfield County?

Survey respondents noted the following topics as the greatest educational needs for families in Garfield County. Internet-related education, including topics such as grooming and digital exploitation, were often viewed as the greatest educational need for families. According to interviewees, this is due to the youth increasingly accessing wider segments of the Internet at earlier ages.

The training topics that would benefit families the most include:



Community-Based
Prevention Strategies



Internet Safety
for Children



Healthy
Internet Usage



Identifying Different
Types of Abuse



Reporting Child
Abuse and Neglect



Online
Sexual Exploitation

Interview participants also highlighted the importance of educating families with foundational information that covers key topics such as reporting laws and processes, gender and sexuality development, consent, and trusting children when they disclose abuse.

“ I think the digital stuff is [important]...I deal with 5th graders sexting every year and that shouldn't be happening...Some of that is parent education. Some of that is kid education. Some of that may be teacher and professional education...”

— Interview Participant

What is the Best Way for Garfield County to Receive Child Abuse Prevention Education?

Survey respondents identified the most effective ways for families and those in community-serving roles to receive child abuse prevention education. Results show that in-person trainings and synchronous trainings are among the most valued methods, both for families and for respondents in their roles.

For Families

- Community events (e.g., parent nights, safety nights, fairs)
- In-person trainings
- Direct information from medical providers (e.g., pediatrician, family doctor)

For Community Serving Roles

- In-person trainings
- Virtual, synchronous trainings (training is hosted live by an educator)
- Virtual asynchronous trainings (people take the training on their own)

Interview participants emphasized that strengthening child abuse prevention education would require an all-encompassing approach, including increased outreach to schools, families, community-based organizations, and Garfield County broadly, with a focus on in-person interaction. These included:



Schools

Integrating education into everyday scheduled activities, such as orientations, forums, and presentations.



Families

Providing parenting classes on positive parenting, conflict de-escalation, and healthy discipline, led by trusted community representatives.



Community-Based Organizations

Increasing collaboration amongst providers to support the development of education for diverse communities.



Garfield County Broadly

Engaging community members with lived experiences with child abuse to mentor families and provide education on child abuse and prevention strategies.

Opportunities for Involvement

- ✓ Develop a cohort of trusted community members to support prevention efforts
- ✓ Engage in joint promotion of educational events to support awareness of learning opportunities
- ✓ Develop and distribute educational materials for diverse communities in Garfield County
- ✓ Provide education on critical topics such as online safety for youth





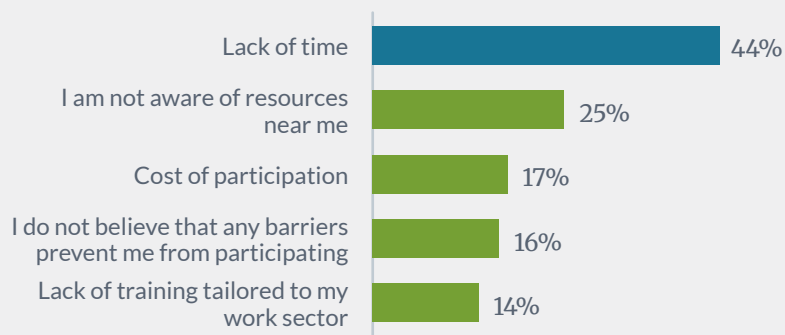
Barriers to Implementing Prevention Education

Survey respondents indicated barriers that make it difficult for them, as well as parents and caregivers, to take part in child abuse prevention education.

For Partner Organizations



Lack of time is the most common barriers for partners when it comes to engaging in child abuse prevention education.



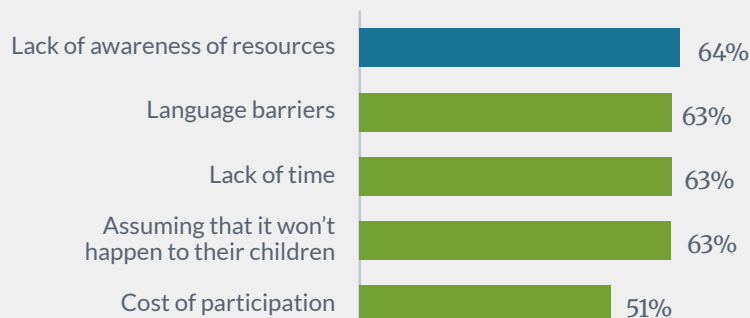
Survey respondents identified unique barriers across Garfield County's different partner groups, which included:

- Child abuse is an uncomfortable topic
- Online training is not engaging enough
- Not related to their work
- Language barriers (e.g., resources not available in preferred language)
- Transportation or distance to training locations

For Community Members



Lack of awareness of resources is the most common barrier for parents and caregivers.



Interview participants noted that individuals would benefit from child abuse prevention trainings that account for the unique cultural dynamics of the following populations:

- Blended families
- Hispanic or Latino communities
- LGBTQ+ populations

Addressing Barriers in Implementation of Prevention Education

Interview participants identified several different barriers to implementing child abuse prevention education in Garfield County that impact parents, service providers, and the general community. Based on the information shared, the following strategies can support these groups in engaging in child abuse prevention.

For Families

Providing prevention education opportunities that are flexible and accessible.

This includes a variety of locations, flexible timing, childcare, and multilingual options. Partnering with schools, community centers, and local county/government partners can increase access and support.

Building a trusted support network helps reduce fear of reporting and judgment through open discussions.

Strengthening this network by connecting parents through parent education sessions, peer groups, or discussions with trusted community partners offers a safe space to ask questions, share concerns, and seek help.

Celebrating cultural values and generational perspectives by offering small workshops or gatherings.

Doing so allows communities to explore how cultural beliefs, such as a lack of willingness to talk about family dynamics or a lack of understanding about the relationship between technology and abuse, shape their views of child abuse. These conversations help foster mutual understanding and highlight the importance of prevention approaches.

“ We added programs and community spaces because we know some families, especially Spanish-speaking mothers, don’t have transportation to reach the public library.”

— Interview Participant

Supporting Service Providers

Integrating training in existing workflows to reduce extra time or allowing dedicated time for professional development or training opportunities.

This can foster a supportive workplace culture that values education and training on child abuse prevention.

Establishing a cross-agency collaborative or partnerships with regular meetings to coordinate efforts.

Reducing duplicative efforts and exploring joint funding opportunities can streamline educational development.

“ I know a lot of agencies are [working] on a lot of different initiatives, and that’s the problem, everyone’s trying to do their own thing, which I think is okay because you’re offering various options for people to be able to attend classes. But it would be a great idea if we could all come together to figure it out.”

— Interview Participant



Supporting Community Engagement

The following strategies can support community dialogue (e.g., workshops, town halls, presentations) and engagement in child abuse prevention, addressing barriers related to community values, the political climate, and attitudes toward sensitive topics identified by interview participants.



Hosting smaller gatherings or sessions to create safe spaces for communities.

Intimate settings can build trust and encourage individuals to share their perspectives on sensitive topics such as child sexual abuse and healthy child sexual development.



Partnering with school districts to provide resources, address questions, and clarify roles.

Clarifying school involvement in prevention work can set up expectations and increase parents' engagement in school-related efforts.



Collaborating with local organizations such as faith-based groups or immigrant advocacy organizations.

Working together ensures culturally relevant approaches are integrated in prevention efforts.



Offering accessible sessions for immigrant and undocumented families.

In-person, virtual, or secure app-based options can provide comfort, safety, and confidentiality.



Considering cultural and political contexts in planning and outreach efforts.

Recognizing how beliefs, traditions, and the current political climate can influence community concerns and participation.

Opportunities for Involvement



Engaging school and local organizational staff in specialized trainings, co-planning sessions, and the selection or distribution of books during community events.



Offering hybrid or virtual options for educational materials, training, and presentations to expand accessibility for families and providers.



Providing follow-up support after community dialogues and specialized trainings, including sending related materials and resources.

“ I don't think the door is completely shut and locked, but sexual abuse prevention work [in schools] is certainly quite challenging.”

— Interview Participant





Call to Action For Partners

Child abuse can affect any family, making it essential to build upon the county's strong service provider network to expand and strengthen prevention efforts. River Bridge seeks partners to help pave the way for a brighter and safer future for all children.

River Bridge's Child Abuse Prevention Education Plan

River Bridge has developed a Child Abuse Prevention Education Plan to guide long-lasting partnerships with local organizations. The plan's goal is to share education and outreach that protects children, empowers families, and strengthens the community by fostering strong inter-agency collaboration and demonstrating a united commitment to prevention.

River Bridge's education plan seeks to readily involve partners in better informing Garfield County of the dangers of child abuse through:

- ✓ Distributing educational materials
- ✓ Hosting or participating in training and presentations
- ✓ Promoting joint efforts through social media, email, and newsletters
- ✓ Sharing information on upcoming trainings, classes, and events



River Bridge Welcomes Everyone to Get Involved!

Help River Bridge advance the education plan's goal of partnering with local organizations to protect children, strengthen families, and foster a more well-educated Garfield County. Partners can address gaps and build upon community strengths by engaging in these actions:

Increase Collaboration



Strengthen Garfield County's existing services by collaborating on new efforts and working together to promote trainings, events, and programming across organizations.

Connect Families to Services and Resources



Offer bilingual and hybrid training, along with culturally validating resources to connect families who are in need with prevention resources.

Advocate with Schools and Local Organizations



Partner with River Bridge to collaborate with schools and local organizations to strengthen child abuse prevention education in critical settings.

Raise Public Awareness



Co-host events, run joint campaigns, and share resources through local agencies and organizations to keep child abuse prevention visible and approachable.

Appendix A

Potential Partner Organizations

Access AfterSchool

Region 1 School District

Advocate Safehouse Project

Region 2 School District

CASA of the 9th

Region 16 School District

English in Action

River Center

Garfield County Community Recreation Centers

Stepping Stones

Garfield County Libraries

The Buddy Program

Great Expectations

Valley Settlement

Lift Up

Voices Unidas

Literacy Outreach

WindWalkers

Mountain Family Health Centers

Youthentity

Pediatric Partners

YouthZone

Raising a Reader