



**RWANDA HEALTH INITIATIVE
FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN**

YOUTH-FRIENDLY CENTRES: INTEGRATED PLATFORMS FOR HEALTH, SRHR, AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Objective

To establish and strengthen youth-friendly centres and community safe spaces that provide integrated health services, comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services, life skills, mental health and psychosocial support, recreation, digital learning, leadership development, and economic empowerment opportunities enabling adolescents and young people, especially those most vulnerable, to thrive and contribute to Rwanda's social and economic development.

The Challenge

Adolescence is a defining stage of life that shapes future health, education, and economic outcomes. Yet many young people in Rwanda continue to face significant barriers to reaching their full potential.

Limited access to youth-friendly health services, unemployment, school dropout, gender-based violence, poor mental health, substance use, and social exclusion continue to undermine the wellbeing of adolescents and young people. These challenges are particularly severe for adolescent girls, young mothers, young people with disabilities, street-connected children, and youth living in poverty.

Although health services are available, many young people avoid traditional health facilities because of stigma, concerns about confidentiality, and fear of judgement. As a result, they often miss opportunities to access essential SRHR information, counselling, and preventive care.

There is growing evidence that adolescents are more likely to seek health services in spaces where they already gather to learn, socialize, access the internet, participate in sports, or develop new skills. Integrating health services within these youth spaces offers an effective way to increase access while promoting broader positive youth development.

Our Solution

The Rwanda Health Initiative for Youth and Women (RHIYW), in partnership with government and development partners, has developed an integrated Youth-Friendly Centre model that brings together health, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), education, recreation, and youth empowerment under one roof. The centres serve as trusted community hubs where adolescents and young people can access confidential, non-judgmental, and age-responsive services in a safe and welcoming environment.



Through this one-stop model, young people can access:

- ▶ Youth-friendly health services
- ▶ A wide range of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services including:
 - ❑ HIV prevention, testing, and counselling
 - ❑ STI Screening & Treatment
 - ❑ Family planning/modern contraceptives
 - ❑ Menstrual health services
 - ❑ Family Planning & Contraception
 - ❑ Basic Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence & Referral
 - ❑ Blood Group & Rhesus Screening
 - ❑ Pregnancy Testing, Counseling, Basic Care & Referral
 - ❑ Screening and Treatment for Vaginal & Reproductive Tract Infections
 - ❑ Screening, Basic Management & Referral for Gynecological Problems
 - ❑ Counselling related to Abortion and Referral
 - ❑ Male Circumcision education & referral
 - ❑ Premarital Counseling
- ▶ Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Screening & Education
- ▶ Mental health and psychosocial support
- ▶ Referrals to specialized health, protection, legal, and social services
- ▶ Life skills and leadership development
- ▶ Recreation, sports, arts, and cultural activities
- ▶ Digital learning and ICT access
- ▶ Entrepreneurship programmes

A cornerstone of the model is **comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education integrated with life skills development**. Through peer education, facilitated group sessions, youth dialogues, and one-on-one counselling, adolescents and young people gain the knowledge, confidence, and practical skills needed to make informed decisions, protect their health, build respectful relationships, and plan for their future.

The age appropriate curriculum covers a broad range of age-appropriate topics, including:

- ❑ Puberty and adolescent development
- ❑ Menstrual health, the menstrual cycle, and fertility awareness
- ❑ Healthy relationships, gender equality, and positive masculinity
- ❑ Prevention of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation
- ❑ Family planning and modern contraceptive methods
- ❑ Prevention of unintended pregnancy
- ❑ HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention
- ❑ Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)



- ❑ Prevention of unsafe abortion through prevention of unintended pregnancy and timely referral for those with unwanted pregnancy to appropriate health services
- ❑ Mental health and emotional wellbeing
- ❑ Substance use prevention
- ❑ Life planning, goal setting, decision-making, and financial literacy
- ❑ Digital literacy, online safety, and responsible use of technology

By combining education with accessible health services, recreation, digital learning, and youth engagement, the centres create trusted spaces where young people can learn, seek support, and access essential services without fear of stigma or discrimination. This integrated approach addresses both immediate health needs and the broader social and economic factors that influence young people's wellbeing and future opportunities

Strategic Interventions (2019–2025)

1. Youth-Friendly Service Hubs

Strengthen integrated community-based Youth-Friendly Centres to provide confidential, adolescent-responsive health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services alongside education, recreation, digital learning, mental health and psychosocial support, and youth empowerment interventions for vulnerable adolescents and young people. During the 2019–2025 implementation period, efforts have primarily focused on strengthening and expanding services at the Musanze Public Youth Centre, demonstrating a scalable model for integrated, youth-friendly service delivery that can be replicated in other districts across Rwanda.

2. Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services

The centers provide confidential, rights-based Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services SRHR education and services, including:

- ❑ HIV prevention, testing, and counselling
- ❑ STI Screening & Treatment
- ❑ Family planning/modern contraceptives
- ❑ Menstrual health services
- ❑ Family Planning & Contraception
- ❑ Basic Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence & Referral
- ❑ Blood Group & Rhesus Screening
- ❑ Pregnancy Testing, Counseling, Basic Care & Referral
- ❑ Screening and Treatment for Vaginal & Reproductive Tract Infections
- ❑ Screening, Basic Management & Referral for Gynecological Problems
- ❑ Counselling related to Abortion and Referral
- ❑ Male Circumcision education & referral
- ❑ Premarital Counseling
- ❑ Health promotion and referrals



Healthcare providers also conduct outreach in communities to reach underserved adolescents and young people with essential health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services. In addition, RHIYW collaborates with Youth-Friendly Corners located within primary public healthcare facilities to ensure that adolescents and young people requiring additional care receive health services, are appropriate referrals, and get support and care.

3. Positive Youth Development

In collaboration with partners, young people participate in interventions that strengthen communication and decision-making, leadership, self-confidence, financial literacy, digital skills, civic engagement, volunteerism, and entrepreneurship. These interventions are designed to build resilience and prepare adolescents and young people for productive and healthy adulthood, with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as adolescent girls, young mothers, out-of-school youth, and other marginalized young people.

4. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Recognizing the growing mental health needs among adolescents and young people, the Youth-Friendly Centre provide accessible, confidential, and adolescent-responsive mental health and psychosocial support services designed to promote emotional wellbeing, resilience, and healthy coping mechanisms. Many young people experience depression, peer pressure, substance use risks, family challenges, and other difficult life circumstances that can affect their wellbeing and development. To address these needs, trained counsellors offer safe, non-judgmental spaces where young people can openly share their concerns and receive appropriate support.

Services include individual counselling, where young people receive one-on-one emotional and psychological support tailored to their specific needs; group counselling and peer support sessions that create opportunities for shared learning, mutual encouragement, and reduced social isolation; and substance use prevention counselling aimed at raising awareness of risks while supporting positive behaviour change. In cases where young people require advanced care, the centres provide referral pathways to specialized mental health services for further assessment and treatment.

Particular attention is given to vulnerable adolescents, including survivors of violence, young mothers, out-of-school youth, young sex workers, Adolescents living with disabilities (physical, visual, hearing, or intellectual), Adolescents living in low-income households, Orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), Adolescents living with HIV, Young people affected by substance use or addiction, Adolescents in child-headed households, Adolescents engaged in child labour or hazardous work and other at-risk groups who may require additional psychosocial and protection support.

Through this integrated approach, the centres ensure that mental health care is not only accessible but also embedded within a broader system of youth-friendly health, protection, and empowerment services.

5. Recreation and Youth Engagement

Sports, arts, music, drama, games, and free internet access serve as powerful entry points for engaging young people. These activities create trusted environments where adolescents and young people naturally access health, SRH information, counselling, and SRHR services while participating in activities they enjoy.

6. Peer Education and Community Outreach

More than 200 trained peer educators extend the reach of the Centre beyond facility-based services by delivering Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education sessions, community awareness campaigns, youth dialogues, and referrals for vulnerable adolescents and young people.



Through engagement in community spaces, and youth gatherings, peer educators play a critical role in providing accurate information, challenging harmful norms, and encouraging positive behavior change among their peers. Peer-led approaches are particularly effective because they build trust, reduce stigma, and create safe spaces for open discussion on sensitive health and social issues. As a result, this model increases service uptake, strengthens community ownership, and improves linkages between young people and available health, protection, and psychosocial support services.

7. Integrated Referral System

The Youth-Friendly Centres play a critical role in linking adolescents and young people to a wide range of health services beyond the centres themselves, ensuring continuity of care and holistic support. Through a referral system, young people are connected to primary healthcare services, mental health care, gender-based violence (GBV) response services, child protection mechanisms, social protection programmes, legal aid, vocational training institutions, and employment opportunities. This integrated referral pathway ensures that the diverse and complex needs of adolescents and young people are addressed in a coordinated manner across different service providers.

Results (2019–2025)

Indicator	Achievement
Adolescents and young people reached with SRHR education	200,000+
Youth participating in sports, arts, and recreational initiatives	150,000+
Vulnerable young people receiving counselling and psychosocial support	5,000+
Peer educators trained and engaged	200+
Youth referred to health and social services	Thousands

Key Outcomes

The integrated Youth-Friendly Centre model has contributed to:

Improved Access to health & SRHR Services

- ❑ Increased use of youth-friendly health services
- ❑ Higher uptake of SRHR information and services
- ❑ Improved access to confidential counselling
- ❑ Stronger referral systems for specialized care

Better Health and Wellbeing

- ❑ Improved SRHR knowledge
- ❑ Increased health-seeking behaviour
- ❑ Better mental health and psychosocial wellbeing
- ❑ Reduced risky behaviours among adolescents

Stronger Positive Youth Development

- ❑ Increased confidence and resilience among vulnerable group of adolescents and young people.



Greater Social Inclusion

- ❑ Increased participation of vulnerable adolescents
- ❑ Improved gender equality and inclusion
- ❑ Stronger peer support networks

Development Impact

Youth Centres have evolved into trusted community platforms that respond to the multiple and interconnected health needs of adolescents and young people through an integrated health service delivery model. By bringing together health services, SRHR psychosocial support, education, sports, recreation, and economic empowerment opportunities, the centers have improved access to essential health services while creating safe, inclusive spaces where young people can learn, develop, and thrive. This integrated model contributes directly to improved adolescent health outcomes, strengthened resilience, reduced vulnerability, and greater social inclusion, while also advancing Rwanda's national priorities for human capital development and sustainable economic growth.

Sustainability and Scale

Sustainability is embedded within the intervention through strong partnerships with district authorities, public health facilities, schools, community-based organizations, and youth volunteers. We invested as well in strengthening the capacity of mid-level healthcare providers, peer educators, counsellors, and youth leaders, thereby enhancing local ownership and ensuring continuity and quality of services. The model provides a cost-effective, efficient, and scalable approach that can be replicated across additional districts to reach more adolescents and young people.

Lessons Learned

Implementation has demonstrated that integrated youth-friendly centres are highly effective platforms for delivering health and SRHR education, protection, and economic empowerment services in a coordinated manner. Combining recreation, sports, and digital engagement with health and SRHR services significantly increases youth participation and service uptake. Confidential, non-judgmental environments are critical in encouraging adolescents and young people to access SRHR and mental health services without fear of stigma. Peer educators remain one of the most effective approaches for reaching vulnerable adolescents and promoting positive behaviour change at community level.

In addition, integrating employment support, digital skills, and entrepreneurship with health and social services contributes to stronger long-term youth development outcomes. Finally, strong partnerships with government institutions, communities, and development partners are essential for ensuring sustainability, ownership, and scale-up of the model.

Investment Priorities

To expand impact, RHIYW seeks strategic partnerships to further strengthen and scale the Youth-Friendly Centre model by expanding access to underserved districts and communities. **Priority will be given to increasing equitable access for adolescent girls, young women, young people with disabilities, out-of-school adolescents, school dropouts, street-connected and homeless youth, adolescents living in poverty, orphans and vulnerable children, young people living with HIV or chronic illnesses, survivors of gender-based violence, adolescent mothers including those affected by refugees and displaced young people, and other marginalized populations** facing heightened vulnerability.

In addition, RHIYW seeks to enhance entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and employment interventions as key social and economic determinants of health, in order to improve long-term sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes and overall wellbeing among vulnerable young people. Further priorities include strengthening peer educator networks and youth leadership initiatives, deepening partnerships with government institutions, schools, TVET institutions, and the private sector, and reinforcing systems.