



2023-2024 YOUTH PEER MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

The [Academy for Community Behavioral Health](#) (the Academy) at the CUNY School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS), with [CUNY SPS Youth Studies](#), the [Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity](#) (NYC Opportunity), and the HRA [Work Progress Program](#) (WPP), is piloting a **Youth Mental Health Advocate** program.

This program will fund 25 youth mental health advocates in NYC youth-serving community-based organizations (CBOs) between September 2023-June 2024. With training and support from the Academy, the youth advocates will help advance culturally responsive, community-centered responses to rising rates of psychological distress among young people.

ELIGIBILITY

CBOs who would like to host Youth Mental Health Advocates must meet the following minimum criteria:

- A nonprofit organization that already delivers services to youth and young people in NYC
- Willingness to accept at least three youth advocates
- Ability to designate a supervisor who will provide routine support to the youth advocates
- Ability to refer young people to clinical care, where needed
- Commitment for the designated supervisor(s) and other key staff to participate in select trainings and implementation support through the Academy

KEY DATES

Attend a virtual open house to learn more about this program:

- [Thursday, May 25 at 1pm](#) or
- [Tuesday, June 6 at 3pm](#)

May 25: Application materials released

June 30: Applications due

Week of July 17: Organizations notified

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Mental health challenges among young people have risen significantly in the past 10 years and have been worsened by the challenges of COVID-19. We have also seen widening disparities, with Black youth and youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth experiencing homelessness or with limited socioeconomic resources among those experiencing more harm and less access to care.

Data collected in NYC by young people working with the CUNY SPS Youth Studies Intergenerational Change Initiative (ICI), which surveys NYC youth ages 13-24, echoes these trends. Three years of consecutive data from ICI's annual Youth Ask Youth survey show that NYC youth view poor mental health as a crisis, along with food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, and a desire for jobs. It also shows that young people want to play an active role in generating solutions to the problems they face.

Placing youth mental health advocates in trusted youth-serving CBOs can help normalize conversations about mental health, make care more accessible, and open pathways to clinical treatment and supports, where needed. For youth advocates themselves, this program will offer personal and professional development, tools to care for their own wellbeing, and support to pursue further education or work opportunities.

The Youth Mental Health Advocate program is part of **Working the Gap**, an initiative of CUNY SPS Youth Studies and the Academy that provides meaningful learning and work experiences to young people who have completed high school or a GED and are not currently enrolled in college.

KEY PROGRAM DETAILS FOR YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES

Youth mental health advocates will receive:

- Specialized training and ongoing coaching to deliver mental health support
- Supports to care for their own mental health
- Paid work experience in a community-based organization (CBO)
- College-level courses and credits
- Support to pursue their education or work goals after the program

This program is expected to include 35+ hours of experiential training and ongoing coaching that help youth advocates learn and use new mental health skills and deliver support to young people in community settings. Beyond training, the Academy will provide youth advocates with ongoing coaching in small groups throughout their work experience at CBOs.

The Academy will equip youth advocates with evidence-supported tools and skills to care for their own wellbeing and offer peer support to other young people. Skills may include:

- Foundations such as engagement skills, self-disclosure, active listening, self-advocacy, and how to use supervision
- Understanding and identifying common mental and behavioral health issues and available resources
- Skills to deliver structured mental health support, to include:
 - Group-based psychoeducation
 - Brief interventions and tools for 1:1 conversations
- Making effective referrals when a higher level of care is needed

Youth advocate services at the CBOs are expected to include facilitating structured support groups; providing individual check-ins and support; and making referrals for clinical care, where appropriate.

We expect this cohort of 25 youth advocates will serve up to 750 young people at their CBOs. We also expect they will provide deeper support - over multiple contacts - to up to 250 young people.

KEY PROGRAM DETAILS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based organizations who host youth mental health advocates will receive:

- Trained youth advocates who can make a positive difference in the mental health of young people your organization serves
- Reimbursement through HRA WPP for wages or stipends paid to the youth advocates
- Specialized training and support from the Academy in topics such as trauma-informed supervision and effective referral pathways
- The opportunity to help shape a Youth Mental Health Advocate program that can be expanded in future years

The Academy will prepare and support CBOs to host the 25 youth advocates. This is expected to include, but may not be limited to, access to the Academy's training in trauma-informed supervision for CBO staff designated to supervise and support the youth advocates. The Academy may also offer other skills training or implementation supports for CBOs, such as strengthening referral pathways or responding to other CBO needs.

TIMELINE

June-August 2023

- Working the Gap program begins
- Up to 75 young people will complete a Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) work experience and CUNY SPS positive youth development course
- Working the Gap participants will select a track for further training and work experience, including the Youth Mental Health Advocate program
- The Academy, HRA WPP, and partners will coordinate youth advocate placements with CBOs selected to host the youth advocates
- Orientation for CBOs

September 2023: Youth Mental Health Advocate Program Start

- CBOs hire and onboard youth advocates
- Academy provides initial training for CBO supervisors
- Academy provides orientation and initial training for youth advocates

October 2023-June 2024

- Academy provides ongoing training and coaching to youth mental health advocates
- Academy provides training, coaching, and support to CBOs
- Youth mental health advocates deliver services at the CBO
- Youth advocates can access additional, optional credit-bearing trainings in youth development
- Youth advocates receive supports from CUNY SPS and CUNY College Access: Research and Action (CARA) to explore and pursue career goals, including college or a next professional role



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