| OCT 2026

2027 YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For NYC Youth-Serving Community-Based Organizations

the academy for community behavioral health

Introduction

The Youth Mental Health Advocate (YMHA) program strengthens the capacity of NYC youth and youth-serving organizations to protect and promote youth mental health.

Part of Working the Gap, an initiative of CUNY SPS Youth Studies, YMHA simultaneously advances the personal and professional development of Youth Advocates; capacity of NYC community-based organizations; availability of youth-centered mental health supports; and, development of NYC's mental health and social services workforce.

YMHA is a program of the Academy for Community Behavioral Health at CUNY SPS. It is made possible by funding and support from the NYC Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity.

Program Eligibility

Who is Eligible to Host Youth Mental Health Advocates

YMHA host organizations are:

- New York City non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs).
- Provide direct care to youth between ages 10-21. This may include social services, health, or mental health care.
- Commit to recruit and support 3 Youth Mental Health Advocates who will complete this fellowship between January-July 2027. Organizations that demonstrate capacity may apply to host up to 6 Youth Mental Health Advocates.
- Designate a qualified Lead YMHA Supervisor to provide ongoing 1:1 and group supervision to YMHAs, coordinate with the Academy, participate in learning network activities, and more.
- Identify up to 3 program sites where YMHAs will work part-time (21 hours/week). Eligible programs will provide opportunities for YMHAs to deliver 1:1 and group mental health support to other young people (at least 75% of work time).

See the 2027 YMHA Community-Based Organization Host Application for additional eligibility considerations. CBOs selected to host YMHAs receive a flexible program grant of at least **$4,500**.

Program Eligibility

Who is Eligible to be a Youth Mental Health Advocate

Youth Mental Health Advocates are:

- Ages 18-24. Through a “near-peer” model, YMHAs provide support to young people at least 1 year younger than they are. CBOs may recruit YMHAs from a more narrow age range based on your program needs. For example, if your program serves youth ages 16-21, we recommend recruiting Youth Advocates ages 22-24.
- Have completed HS or a GED, do not have a college degree, and are not currently enrolled in college.
- Seek a pathway to helping professions where they can make a difference in youth mental health in NYC.
- Share a connection to the mission of a host community-based organization (CBO). This may include, but need not be limited to:
  - Current or prior experience receiving services at the CBO or a similar organization
  - Shared lived or cultural experience with young people the CBO serves
  - Resident of a neighborhood the CBO serves
  - Other meaningful connections



Program Model

YMHA places young people who are of the communities that CBOs serve into meaningful professional roles where they help design and deliver youth-centered mental health support.

Please review the full **Youth Mental Health Advocate (YMHA) Program Approach**. This describes the supports YMHAs receive during their fellowship, including a **$10,000 stipend**, 100+ hours of training and coaching from the Academy, supervision at their host organization, and other resources. It also describes what Youth Advocates do at their community-based organizations. YMHAs work 3 days (21 hours) per week and will spend at least 75% of their time providing 1:1 and group youth mental health support.

Program Timeline

Key 2027 Program Launch Dates

- **October 13-November 2, 2026**: Application period for Community-Based Organizations to Host Youth Mental Health Advocates in 2027. **Apply here**.
- **October 21, 2026**: Virtual open house for community-based organizations interested in applying to host YMHAs (recommended): **10:00am-11:00am via Zoom**. **Register here**.
- **November 9-18, 2026**: Academy interviews with key staff at potential CBO host organizations (select sites).
- **November 23, 2026**: Academy notifies CBOs of application decision.
- **December 1, 2026**: Virtual orientation for selected CBOs (Part 1), 10:00am-11:00am via Zoom.
- **December 1, 2026 - January 8, 2027**: CBOs recruit and select Youth Mental Health Advocates.
- **Week of January 18, 2027**: Orientation (Part 2) for selected CBOs. In-person at CUNY SPS.
- **Week of January 25, 2027**: YMHA Orientation. In-person at CUNY SPS.
- **By February 1, 2027**: CBOs complete YMHA onboarding.
- **February 1-26, 2027**: YMHA training at the Academy. In-person at CUNY SPS. Includes time to shadow and observe at the host CBO.
- **March 1-July 30, 2027**: YMHA work experience at the CBO (21 hours/week). Includes ongoing training and coaching from the Academy.

Connect with the Academy's 2027 Youth Mental Health Advocate Program

Questions: ymha@sps.cuny.edu

Attend the Virtual CBO Open House: Register here.
Wednesday, October 21, 2026, 10:00am-11:00am via Zoom

Apply to Host Youth Mental Health Advocates: Apply here.
Applications are accepted through Monday, November 2, 2026.

Join the Academy's mailing list: Sign up here.
Receive notifications about the Academy's free behavioral health learning programs for NYC non-profit care providers.

