



Empowering Futures: A Mental Health Pre-Apprenticeship Curriculum

Curricular Overview & Key Questions

Curriculum Overview, FAQs, & Syllabus

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Empowering Futures: A Mental Health Pre-Apprenticeship Curriculum

Executive Overview

The United States is facing a growing mental health crisis—particularly among young people—while communities across the country are experiencing a critical shortage of behavioral health professionals. Employers, workforce systems, and community-based organizations are increasingly aligned to the need for earlier, more intentional pathways into mental health and community wellbeing careers that expand the talent pipeline while preparing individuals for long-term success in the field.

Empowering Futures is a no-cost, flexible mental health pre-apprenticeship curriculum designed to help organizations introduce individuals to behavioral health careers while building essential interpersonal and professional skills. The curriculum equips learners with workforce-ready competencies—such as active listening, de-escalation, cultural responsiveness, and professional communication—preparing them for successful entry into Registered Apprenticeship Programs and entry-level roles.

By creating clear on-ramps from career exploration to training and employment, Empowering Futures strengthens local talent pipelines, reduces onboarding challenges, and supports long-term workforce development in mental health and community wellbeing fields.

What This Curriculum Does

Empowering Futures equips learners with essential, transferable skills that are foundational across mental health, healthcare, and human services roles, including:

- Active listening and effective communication
- Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques



- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive engagement
- Self-reflection, wellness planning, and professional readiness
- Exposure to real-world mental health and community wellbeing settings

Through guided instruction, interactive activities, and structured shadowing experiences, participants gain both practical skill development and career clarity—preparing them to successfully transition into Registered Apprenticeships such as [Community Health Worker](#), [Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Counselor](#), [Peer Support Specialist](#), and other related pathways.

The Curriculum at a Glance

Length:	8 weeks (approximately 2 months)
Total instructional time:	40 hours
Session frequency:	2 sessions per week
Session duration:	2.5 hours per session
Delivery format:	In-person or virtual (decided by implementing organization)
Recommend group size:	8-25 individuals (although it can be adapted for smaller or larger groups!)
Core components:	Facilitated instruction, interactive skill-building, career exploration, shadowing experience
Outcomes:	Preparedness for Registered Apprenticeships and entry-level behavioral health roles
Credentials earned:	Certificate of completion and Mental Wellness Credly Badge

Organizations may adapt delivery and pacing to meet local needs, provided all required sessions and learning objectives are completed.



Who This Curriculum Is For

Empowering Futures is designed for broad adoption and local customization. It can be implemented by:

- Community-based organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Workforce development agencies
- Educational institutions
- Employers and apprenticeship sponsors
- Public systems and intermediaries

The curriculum is adaptable for learners of different ages and backgrounds, including youth and young adults exploring career pathways, career-changers interested in mental health work, and individuals seeking foundational skills before entering formal training or apprenticeship programs.

Why It Matters—to Employers and Communities

For employers and workforce partners, Empowering Futures offers a low-barrier, high-impact way to:

- Expand and diversify the behavioral health talent pipeline
- Reduce entry barriers to mental health careers
- Improve preparedness and retention of early-career workers
- Strengthen connections between training, apprenticeships, and employment
- Align workforce development efforts with real labor market demand

By investing upstream—before individuals enter apprenticeships or employment—organizations can help ensure that future workers are not only interested in mental health careers, but ready for the realities of the work.

How to Use This Document

The sections that follow provide practical guidance for organizations interested in implementing the Empowering Futures curriculum. The Frequently Asked



Questions (FAQs) address common questions about cost, implementation, learner expectations, credentials, and pathways to Registered Apprenticeships. The syllabus and curriculum overview outline the structure, learning goals, and delivery model.

Whether you are an employer, intermediary, or community partner, this guide is intended to help you determine how Empowering Futures can support your workforce goals and how to get started.



Frequently Asked Questions

Cost of Curriculum & Payment

How much does it cost to use this curriculum?

The curriculum is offered at no cost! However, we ask that you share participant data with FHI 360 at apprenticeship@fhi360.org so we can accurately track the number of pre-apprentices who complete the curriculum and provide them with their certificate of completion and [Mental Wellness Credly badge](#).

Is payment provided for implementing the curriculum?

No, we do not offer payment to organizations for implementing the pre-apprenticeship curriculum.

Are the participants (Learners) provided with payment for their participation?

The National Youth Employment Coalition and FHI 360's NIWL do not pay the [Learners](#) for their participation. Although not required, we do encourage organizations to pay the pre-apprentices when possible.

Certificate of Completion & Credly Badge

What do the participants receive upon completion of the curriculum?

Participants receive a certificate of completion and a [Mental Wellness Credly badge](#), which can be included on resumes or LinkedIn profiles.

What is required of a participant to receive the certificate of completion & Credly badge?

The Learners must attend all of the meeting sessions described in the pre-apprenticeship curriculum. The facilitator, called a [Navigator](#), must email FHI 360 (apprenticeship@fhi360.org) when the Learners have completed the curriculum, and FHI 360 will provide them with the certificate of completion and [Mental Wellness Credly badge](#).



Curriculum Delivery and Instructors

Can your organization implement this pre-apprenticeship curriculum independently?

Yes! This curriculum is designed so that organizations can use it on their own. Organizations can use the curriculum provided by NYEC/FHI 360 free of charge. The implementing organization will need to identify a facilitator (also known as the [Navigator](#)), who can attend an optional Navigator Support Session (held virtually) with NYEC to learn more about how to implement the curriculum.

Navigator Support Sessions are offered 2-3 times per year; individuals interested in attending a Navigator Support Session should fill out the [Pre-Apprenticeship Interest Form](#). They will then receive an email with a Zoom link to the next Facilitator Support Session.

If the individual wants to implement the curriculum before the next Facilitator Support Session is offered, they should reach email apprenticeship@fhi360.org to request a link to a recording.

Who can deliver this curriculum?

Any organization can implement this curriculum, as long as they can identify a [Navigator](#) and identify and recruit Learners. See pages 12-14 for more information on the ideal profile of a Navigator, as well as a list of their responsibilities.

Identifying the Learners

Who can take this course?

The curriculum is adaptable and may be used with individuals of any age who are interested in pursuing or learning more about careers in the mental health field while developing professional and interpersonal communication skills.

What is expected of the Learners?

Participants will actively engage in discussions, activities, and group exercises



while completing self-reflection and wellness planning activities. Participants will also document key takeaways and provide feedback to support continuous improvement of the curriculum. Refer to pages 13 and 14 of this document for more information.

What will Learners do in this course? What skills will they gain?

They will practice and refine communication skills—such as active listening and conflict resolution—by applying feedback from navigators and peers and observing mental health professionals during shadowing experiences.

How challenging is the pre-apprenticeship curriculum?

The curriculum is beginner friendly and focuses on building foundational knowledge and practical skills. While learners should ideally have a 10th-grade reading and writing level, the Navigators can adapt materials for different literacy levels and ages. Activities are interactive and designed to support success for learners with varying backgrounds.

Group Size

What is the recommended group size for the pre-apprenticeship curriculum?

There is no strict minimum or maximum number of participants. Navigators can adapt the activities to suit both smaller and larger groups, ensuring that the class meetings and activities remain engaging for all participants. The recommended group size is between 8 and 25 participants to maintain a level of engagement and diversity of group pairings during each class session.

Shadowing Experience

What are some examples of appropriate shadowing experiences that the Learners can partake in?

Learners may shadow mental health and community wellbeing professionals in



settings where observation is permitted and does not violate confidentiality, consent, or organizational or state/federal policies.

Learners should participate in appropriate experiences that provide exposure to the field of mental health and community wellbeing. Examples include observing one-on-one career coaching or motivational interviewing sessions, supporting outreach efforts such as distributing informational materials on self-care, attending community education events, or shadowing administrative, intake, or program coordination functions.

The Navigator should work with the Learners to identify suitable shadowing opportunities based on what is available in the local community and determine what experiences are permissible. The Navigator is responsible for ensuring that all shadowing activities align with legal requirements, organizational policies, and ethical standards.

Learners can visit the [University of Minnesota's Pre-Health Student Resource Center](#) for guidance and tips on identifying and locating a shadowing experience. Please keep in mind that the shadowing experience **does not** have to be in a health setting but can also take place in a youth-serving organizational setting, and Learners should adapt their research and outreach efforts accordingly.

The Navigator is encouraged to debrief with the Learners after their shadowing experience, ideally asking them to identify what skills they could use in those situations, had they been the lead professional (such as active listening, trauma-informed support, motivational interviewing skills, etc).

Understanding the Use of Curriculum

How does an organization formalize their use of the curriculum?

To formalize use of the curriculum, organizations must complete the [enrollment form](#). Upon completing enrollment, organizations will receive an invite to our Learning Management System (LMS) and will need to complete a 15-minute



onboarding eModule in the LMS to download our curriculum.

Do note that the curriculum's branding and requirements (e.g. FHI 360 and NYEC's logo, Department of Labor disclaimers and Stevens Amendment, etc.) must not be altered upon implementation. More information on this will be covered in the onboarding eModule.

The Elements of a Quality Pre-apprenticeship

Is this an official pre-apprenticeship program?

This curriculum is just one of the six essential components of a quality pre-apprenticeship program, as outlined by the Department of Labor (DOL). If an organization wishes to build a pre-apprenticeship that is recognized by their state DOL, they will need to reach out to their state DOL or education regulatory body to inquire about the state-specific requirements for pre-apprenticeship programs.

We recommend incorporating the other recommended elements of a quality pre-apprenticeship, when possible. All six components can be reviewed on apprenticeship.gov.

We also recommend organizations reach out to their state Department of Labor with any questions about establishing a pre-apprenticeship program in their state.

Pathway to Apprenticeships

How can this curriculum support pathways to a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)?

We encourage the organization implementing the pre-apprenticeship curriculum to connect with potential employer partners and Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in their community to identify available apprenticeship opportunities.

FHI 360's National Institute for Work and Learning has developed 3 RAPs that can be implemented in different states across the United States—[Youth Development](#)



Practitioner, Community Health Worker, and Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Counselor. A Peer Support Specialist RAP is also in development; stay tuned for more info.

Organizations that are looking to recruit, train, and/or upskill new or existing direct service roles and youth-serving fields who want to potentially implement one of these RAPs in their communities should fill out the [apprenticeship interest form](#).



Curriculum Syllabus

Overview of the Curriculum

This comprehensive curriculum is designed to prepare individuals for careers in the mental health field, ideally to be used in a pre-apprenticeship program. It combines foundational knowledge, skills development, hands-on experience, and wraparound support to equip participants for success in this rewarding field.

Curriculum Goals

- Increase awareness of mental health careers and pathways.
- Facilitate transitions to registered apprenticeships or employment opportunities in the mental health field.
- Develop foundational knowledge in mental health concepts, terminology, and support strategies.
- Build essential skills in communication, active listening, problem-solving, and cultural competency.
- Provide hands-on experience through supervised pre-apprenticeship placements in diverse mental health settings.
- Foster personal development through peer support and access to mental health services.
- Foster professional development through mentorship and access to simulated real-life work experiences.

Curricular Approach

Learner-Navigator Approach

The curriculum must follow a learner-navigator model, where:

Learners: Youth participants (16+), with limited prior experience in mental health fields.

Navigators: Facilitators (e.g., NYEC members) who guide the sessions. These individuals may not have formal mental health training but need clear guidance to facilitate.



Ideal Navigator and Learner Roles

Navigator

Role: Facilitator guiding participants through content and skill-building exercises in a way that encourages engagement, while also providing support to the Learners and fostering a supportive environment for practice and feedback.

Ideal Profile:

- NYEC member or community leader with experience in youth programming, communication training, and/or leadership.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to model effective communication strategies.
- Familiarity with the following topics is preferred, but not required:
 - Mental health topics
 - Conflict resolution
 - Active listening techniques

Responsibilities:

- Deliver content using the facilitator guide, ensuring all key topics are covered.
- Facilitate group discussions and encourage participation.
- Provide feedback on self-reflection exercises and wellness plans.
- Lead role-playing and practice activities, providing constructive feedback to Learners.
- Create a safe, inclusive space for discussions.
- Manage guest speaker sessions and coordinate logistics.
- Coordinate observation opportunities with mental health professionals for real-world context.



Learner

Role: Participant actively engaging in skill-building exercises to enhance communication abilities and interpersonal effectiveness and gain foundational knowledge about mental health.

Ideal Profile:

- Individuals who are potentially disconnected and/or interested in exploring mental health career pathways and developing professional and interpersonal communication skills.
- Limited prior exposure to mental health topics but a strong interest and willingness to learn.
- Open to engaging in interactive activities, such as discussions and role-playing scenarios; open to receiving feedback.

Responsibilities:

- Actively participate in discussions, activities, and group exercises.
- Complete all self-reflection exercises and wellness plans.
- Practice applying communication strategies, such as active listening and conflict resolution.
- Reflect on feedback from the navigator and peers to improve skills.
- Observe and document communication strategies used by mental health professionals during shadowing opportunities.
- Provide feedback on learning experiences for continuous improvement of the curriculum.

Implementation Plan

Navigator Activities

Preparation: Review the facilitator guide and additional resources provided for each module.



Session Facilitation: Conduct interactive sessions, ensuring clear communication of key topics.

Coordination: Arrange for guest speakers and manage Q&A sessions. Arrange for other activities, such as career fairs or shadowing of a mental health professional.

Feedback: Evaluate Learners' participation and provide constructive guidance on activities.

Learner Activities

Learning Engagement: Participate in discussions on mental health, communication, and more.

Skill Application: Engage in role-playing and group activities to practice foundational strategies and ensure understanding of topics.

Personal Growth: Develop a final portfolio to demonstrate acquired knowledge and growth throughout the duration of the curriculum.

Curriculum Structure

The curriculum is divided into four modules, each focusing on a key area of learning:

- Module 1: Introduction to Mental Health
- Module 2: Communication and Interpersonal Skills
- Module 3: Mental Health Support Strategies
- Module 4: Career Exploration and Pathways

Use of Technology

When Learners have technology available in addition to Internet access, there are ways to bring the use of technology into the mix. For example, Navigators can use tools like Kahoot for Icebreakers and Warm-ups, adding a bit of fun and engagement when possible. There are also many activities in the curriculum that require Learners to do research on certain topics, so these activities naturally integrate technology, as Learners can use their phone, tablet, or computer to do so.

However, we also know that some Navigators might be working with Learners who don't have access to their own devices, like iPads or computers, or they might be teaching in



spaces without Wi-Fi. As a result, we’ve made sure the curriculum is flexible and can work even in simple learning environments. If the Navigator recognizes that Learners might not be able to research topics easily (for whatever reason), the Navigator should print out research articles ahead of the class that the Learners can read and use for those activities.

Session Outline

Week	Session	Module & Session Topic(s)	Time
1	1	Pre-apprenticeship Overview & Introductions 1.1 Mental Health Awareness	2.5 hours
	2	1.2 Cultural Perceptions of Mental Health 1.3 Stigma Reduction	2.5 hours
	3	1.4 Mental Health Conditions 1.5 Recovery and Resilience	2.5 hours
2	4	1.5 (continued) Recovery and Resilience 1.6 Self-Care and Well-being	2.5 hours
	5	Module 1 review 2.1 Active Listening	2.5 hours
3	6	2.2 Non-verbal Communication 2.3 Effective Communication	2.5 hours
	7	2.3 (continued) Effective Communication 2.4 Conflict Resolution	2.5 hours
4	8	2.4 (continued) Conflict Resolution Module 2 review	2.5 hours
	9	3.1 Crisis Intervention 3.2 De-escalation Techniques	2.5 hours
5	10	3.3 Peer Support Frameworks	2.5 hours
	11	3.4 Basic Counseling Skills	2.5 hours
6	12	3.5 Cultural Competency in Care Module 3 Review	2.5 hours
	13	4.1 Mental Health Careers 4.2 Educational Pathways	2.5 hours
7	14	4.2 Educational Pathways (continued) 4.3 Job Search Strategies	2.5 hours
	15	4.4 Networking and Professional Development 4.5 Transition Support	2.5 hours
8	16	4.5 Transition Support Portfolio Presentations & Course Wrap-up	2.5 hours
	Total time:		40 hours