

PEERS HELPING PEERS (PHP)

A Community Based, Peer-Centered Program to Reduce Mental Health Stigma and Improve Wellness

OVERVIEW OF PEERS HELPING PEERS

Peers Helping Peers (PHP) was developed in 2020 through a partnership between Health Education Council and the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA). Created with a grant from Sacramento County's California Mental Health Services Authority funds, PHP has a **three-fold mission to 1) decrease mental health stigma in Sacramento's young adult and Spanish-speaking adult populations; 2) increase social connection and the ability of participants to serve as mental health supports for their peers, and 3) introduce participants to entry-level mental health jobs through community projects and paid internships.**

PHP employs a peer support model that research indicates can increase:

- Sense of hope and inspiration
- Social support and functioning
- Empathy and acceptance
- Engagement in self-care and wellness

PROGRAM DESIGN & COMMUNITY IMPACT

PHP was jointly developed and led by HEC, a non-profit dedicated to cultivating health in under-served communities through the power of collaboration and SETA, a joint powers agency of Sacramento dedicated to connecting people to jobs and services.

PHP utilizes a specialized 7-week training program to help youth and Spanish-speaking adults understand mental health basics and serve as a resource for their peers. The youth training is presented in English and adult training in Spanish; both training cohorts average 20 participants who meet weekly via Zoom. Participants are recruited from communities hard hit by structural inequities. Since Fall 2020, PHP has **graduated over 100 participants** from its training program with **over 90% continuing on to complete paid internships and community projects.**



**TARGET
ZIP CODES**

95815
95817
95820
95822
95823
95824
95828
95832
95838
95841
95842
95864



PHP YOUTH COHORT

APPLICATION/ SELECTION

The PHP Youth cohort is composed of 17-24 year-olds from diverse cultural backgrounds. Youth are recruited through community networks and nonprofit partners in the Sacramento region. Youth complete applications, are interviewed by HEC Staff, and 20 are selected for each cohort. Applicants who are not placed in a cohort are referred to other HEC programs, external partners, or placed on a waiting list for the next cohort which starts every two months.

YOUTH PARTICIPANTS REPORT:

100% 

- Understand cultural stigmas on mental health
- Believe they can be a mental health advocate for family/friends

88% 

- Are more aware of mental health resources in the community
- Know how to refer a friend to mental health services and are comfortable encouraging friends and family to seek mental health support

“A hardship I experienced last year was a lack of a social life, and PHP filled that through peer interaction” - PHP Graduate

CLASS CONTENT

Classes occur twice a week on Zoom, for 3 hours per session. HEC and SETA staff facilitate the 7-week class sessions in collaboration with mental health and community-based organizations.

Training topics include

- Mental health & its links to culture and racism
- Mental health basics
- Trauma & resilience
- Substance abuse
- Healthy relationships
- Workforce readiness

INTERNSHIPS AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES

After graduation from the seven week training, youth earn \$300, and are connected to SETA for internship placement. **Youth complete a paid 40-hour internship at local mental health and social service agencies to introduce youth to jobs in which they can use their lived experience to help others.** Some of the placement agencies include, NAMI, Sacramento County, Cal Voices Warmline, Sobriety Brings a Change, and My Sister's House. **Approximate 10% of PHP youth have secured post-internship employment at their agency.**



PHP SPANISH-SPEAKING ADULT COHORT

APPLICATION/ SELECTION

The Spanish-speaking PHP cohort is composed of **Spanish speaking adults in Sacramento County who are interested in becoming lay and/or paid mental health navigators for their friends, family, and neighbors.** Adults are referred to the program from local nonprofit partners as well as from peers. Many participants face challenges such as caring for children, mental health, immigration, financial burdens, and managing work responsibilities. As a result, the program schedule is flexible, designed to help participants complete the program while at the same time coping with their life challenges. Each cohort hosts 15-20 participants, the majority of whom are employed or work as stay-at-home parents.

CLASS CONTENT

Developed in collaboration with Dr. Monica Torreiro-Casal, a lecturer in Chicana/o studies at UC Davis, the 7-week training takes place via Zoom live, once a week, for 1.5 hours. In addition, Google classroom is used for 1 hour asynchronous sessions to engage participants and complete homework assignments. **Sessions are offered solely in Spanish to provide for greater accessibility and reduce linguistic/cultural barriers.** Participants receive \$300 at completion of the 7-week course.

INTERNSHIPS AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Participants are exposed to a range of paid and volunteer work experiences designed to help them explore how their lived experience can support the mental health of their community. Some participants complete paid internships through SETA and others opt for short-term volunteer projects. For example, one graduate led a 10-week art and mental well-being group for women through Zoom.

Approximately 10% of the Spanish-speaking cohort has secured post-internship employment at their agency.

The Spanish-speaking adult cohort receives specialized training on the following topics:

- Symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicide ideation
- Self-care
- How to listen to others and help navigate health/mental health/support services
- Health and mental health services available in Sacramento County
- The role of peer support in mental health in the Latinx community
- How to use your skills to support community mental health as both paid and unpaid (informal) peer supporters

PHP TAKEAWAYS

The American Psychological Association (APA) found that the US mental health workforce was 86% white, 5% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and only 4% Black/African American. PHP supports the critical need for a larger, more diverse mental health workforce, better equipped to mitigate multiple negative effects of untreated mental illness like incarceration, school failure, prolonged suffering, and unemployment. The PHP cohorts help to bring new insights, perspectives, and ideas to improve health outcomes among Sacramento's youth and Latinx communities.

Over 90% percent of participants reported they were more aware of community services, how to access services and how to get help for someone who needed mental health assistance.

TESTIMONIALS

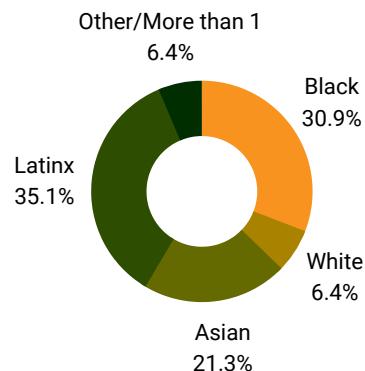
*"The trainers created the perfect space that made each one of us feel unique"
- Spanish-speaking cohort participant*

*"PHP brings real world problems to the attention of young adults"
- Youth cohort participant*

In a critical time of health and social injustice, PHP prepares participants to discuss lived experiences with racism, social relationships, mental health, and more.

PHP creates a platform on which lived experience is a launching pad to both volunteer and paid jobs in mental health support, creating opportunities to expand and diversify Sacramento's mental health workforce.

YOUTH COHORT



SPANISH-SPEAKING COHORT

- 89.5% are 26-59 years old.
- 85.7% are female.
- 85.7% identify Spanish as their preferred language.



The Health Education Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that cultivates health and well-being in underserved communities by leveraging the power of collaboration. Visit www.healtheducouncil.org for more info.

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