

**BUILDING THE WORLD'S MENTAL
HEALTH WORKFORCE**



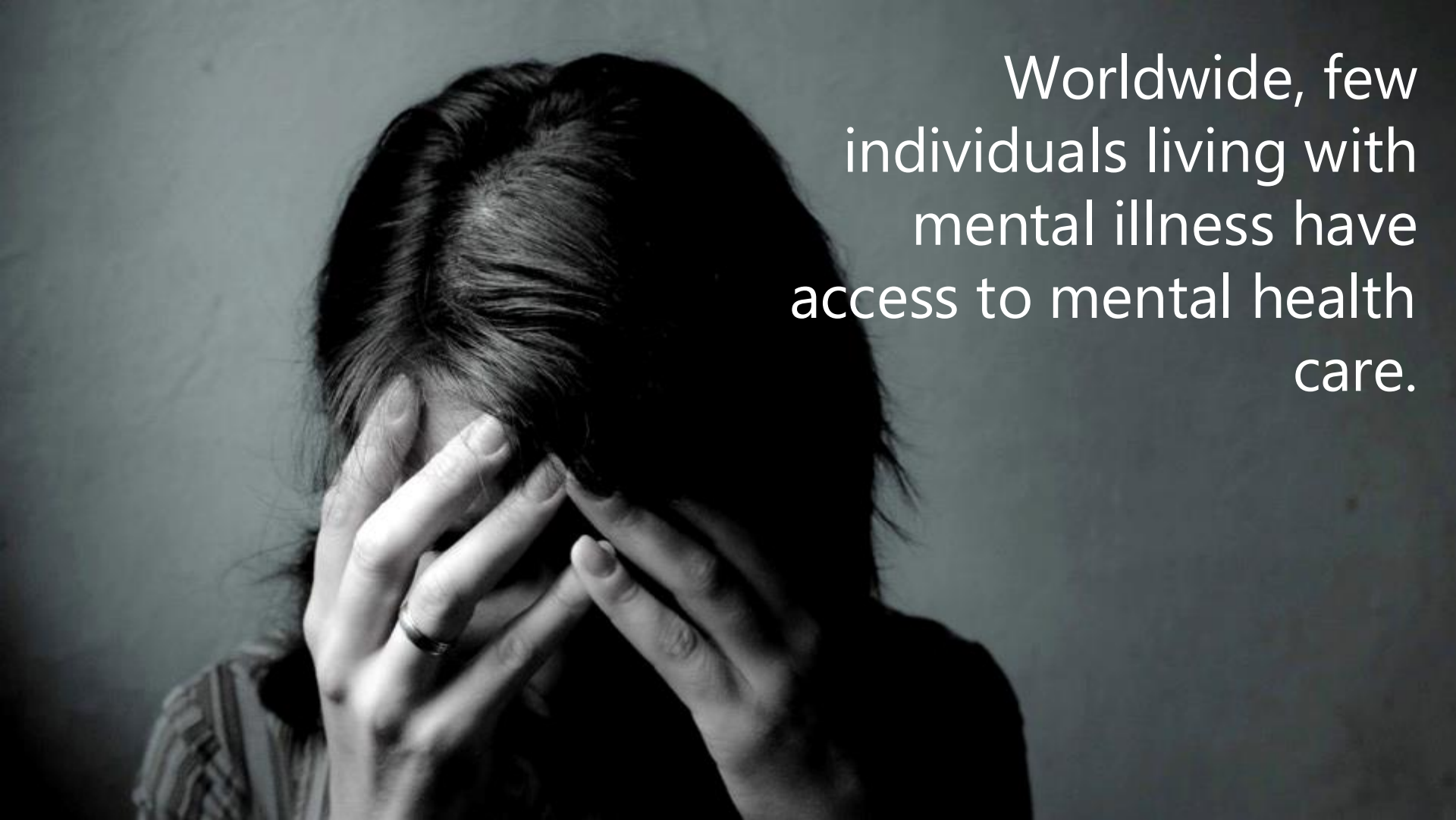
Congregational Collective

September 14, 2026



HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF
Global Health and
Social Medicine



Worldwide, few
individuals living with
mental illness have
access to mental health
care.

Navigating the Mental Health Challenge

01

Psychosocial interventions are among the most effective for the prevention and care of a range of mental health problems across the life course

02

Front-line workers without specialized training in mental health can be trained and supported in effectively delivering these interventions across diverse settings

03

Despite this evidence, the vast majority of people and populations around the world have **no access to proven psychosocial interventions**

04

While this **gap** between the science and its application in the real-world is largest in lower income countries, it is **significant even in high-income countries**

Rethinking the Mental Health Workforce

"Frontline providers" refers to anyone in a role that provides services in their community or is face-to-face with community members. This can mean **community health workers, volunteers at youth organizations, faith leaders, peer support workers, and more.**

Those who may be trained and equipped to deliver an evidence-based mental health intervention to expand the role of a clinician

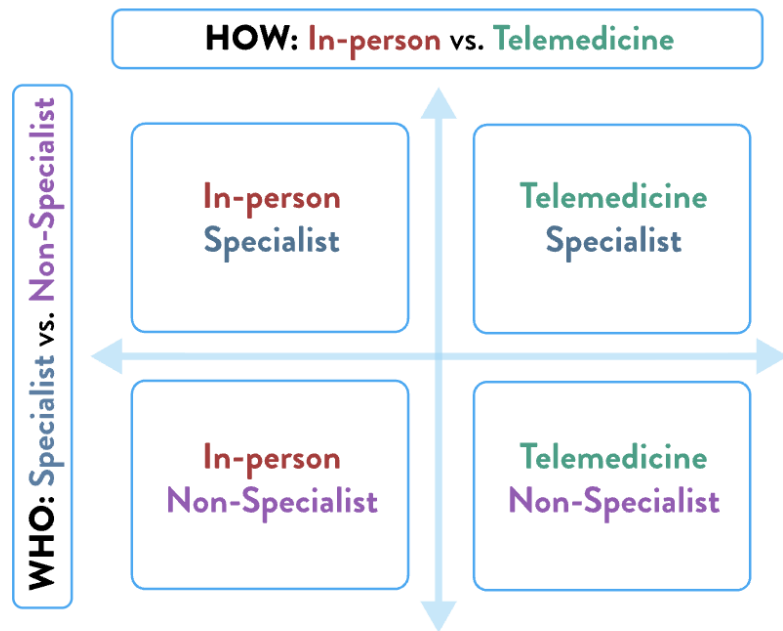


Those with lived experience of a mental health challenge may be trained and equipped to use their own experience to support their peers in a non-clinical capacity

A photograph showing a woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, holding the hand of a child. Another person's hand is visible on the right, also holding the child's hand. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with light-colored curtains.

***Does this model work
in community
settings in the United
States?***

SUMMIT Trial



AIM: To improve access to mental health care for pregnant women and new mothers.

WHY: Therapy is preferred by women over medication, but only 1 in 5 women receive therapy.

SETTING: The study was completed across sites in Toronto, Chicago, and North Carolina.

IMPACT: Safe and effective for perinatal depression



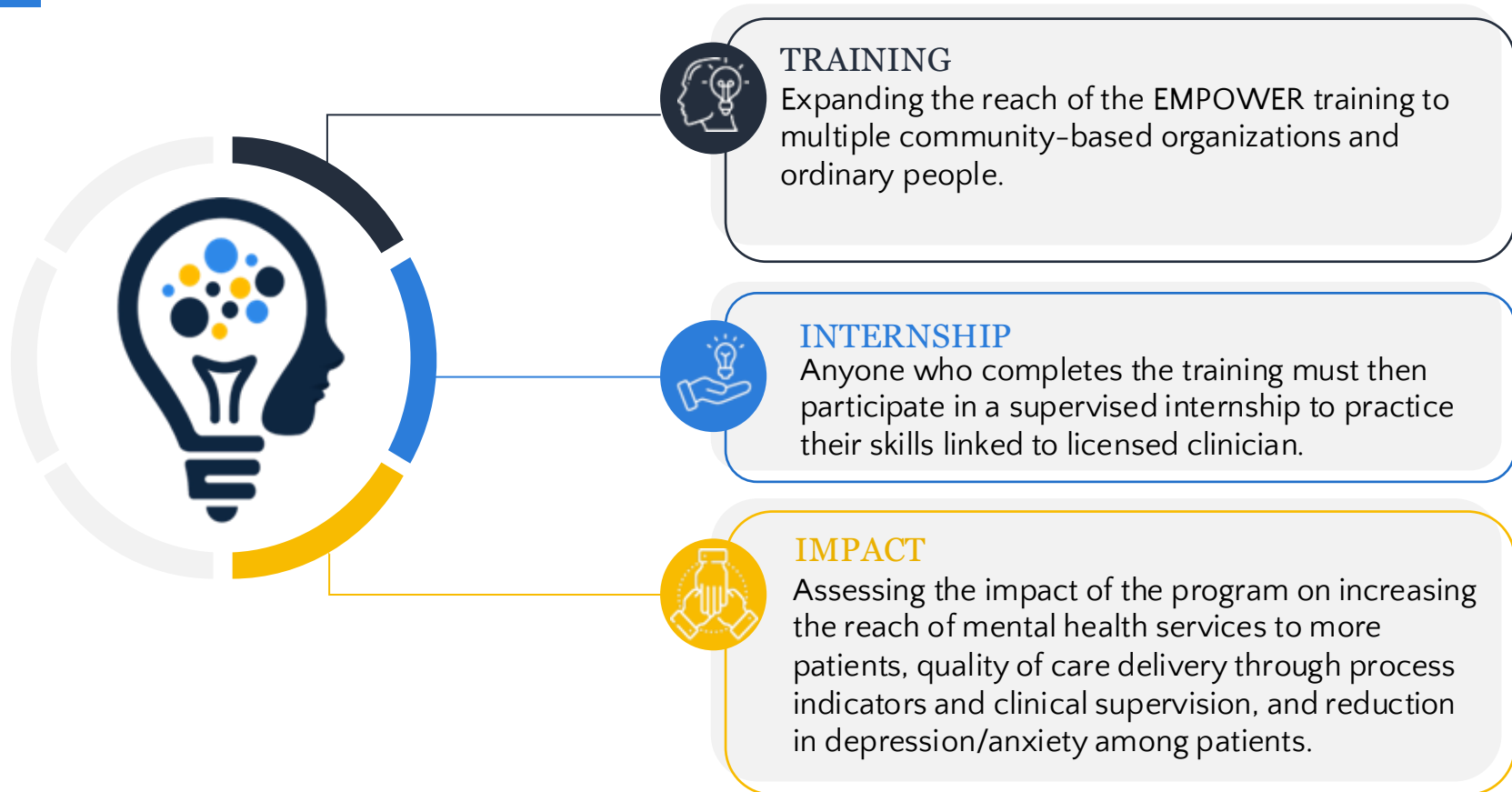
EMPOWER

BUILDING THE WORLD'S MENTAL
HEALTH WORKFORCE

EMPOWER

A digital solution
for learning, mastering, and
delivering quality-assured psychosocial
interventions.

Beyond Health System



Depression in Adults

We have co-created a digital training curriculum to equip frontline providers with a scalable, evidence-based intervention to address depression symptoms in adults, called Behavioral Activation (BA). Depression has been the first mental health condition addressed by EMPOWER.



This training builds on 10+ years of research, including seminal trials in India and the US. Behavioral Activation is a brief yet powerful component of CBT. Delivered in just 6–8 sessions, it has proven to be highly effective for depression.



The intervention has been implemented by community health workers in Madhya Pradesh, India, and 500+ frontline providers have been trained in the US across 60 cities in Texas, and areas in Massachusetts.



Currently, leaders from several churches in Texas are getting equipped on depression care through BA, to support their congregations. Additionally, frontline providers in two low-resource areas in Texas are undergoing training recruitment.

Collaborators

Funders

Course 1: Foundational Skills Training

Course Logistics

Foundational Skills (FS) is a short course that introduces the learner to basic foundational mental health and counseling concepts.

Examples of the lessons covered in this course include:

- What is mental health? What is counseling?
- Active listening, showing empathy, building rapport, respecting confidentiality
- Responding to risk
- Supervision
- Self-care

These represent the essential skills needed for supporting anyone facing challenges with mental illness.

Course Timeline

- Participant time commitment: minimum 10 hours, for the completion of 8 modules



When asking about substance use, make sure to ask 3 main questions. Ask about:

1. The amount of use (how much?)
2. The frequency of use (how often?)
3. The duration of use (for how long?)

For example, "how many beers do you consume each day after work?"



Course 2: Behavioral Activation Training

Course Logistics

The second course is **Behavioral Activation**, which serves to develop the specific skills of learners to deliver an evidence-based brief psychosocial intervention to persons facing challenges with depression.

Examples of the lessons covered in this course include:

- Understanding depression
- Useful strategies for problem solving
- Getting started with behavioral activation
- Getting active
- Linking function, activity, and mood

The BA training is adapted for mastering the delivery of effective care for depression in just six sessions by front-line providers.

Course Timeline

- Participant time commitment: minimum 10 hours, for the completion of 8 modules



Model of Behavioral Activation

These questions allow us to understand how a client's depression developed and continues to occur:

- 1 "What happened?"
- 2 "How did you feel?"
- 3 "What did you do?"
- 4 "What is the connection between what you do/ don't do and how you respond to the problems in your life?"



EMPOWER BA Spanish Adaptation

The EMPOWER BA material was adapted to Spanish with a culturally and contextually sensitive approach. This process involved thorough review, feedback, translation, and video production to ensure relevance and accuracy for Spanish-speaking communities.

1

Initial Review Guide & Feedback

A guide was created to support the English FS & BA curriculum review process by Spanish bilingual CHWs from Texas for translation readiness

2

Focus Group for insights

Group discussions conducted with the CHWs on their experience with the course, leading to qualitative insights. Creation of a guide to support the translation

3

Adaptation Guide creation

Curation of a robust guide from feedback received, to inform an adaptation that ensures linguistic accuracy, and cultural relevance in the written & visual content

4

Script Adaptation & Translation

The English scripts were translated by bilingual certified clinical psychologists and reviewed by our collaborators in the field

5

Video Production Process

Native Spanish-speaking actors were handpicked to play designated roles in the script. The shot videos underwent rigorous editing & reviews

6

Manuals Development

Supplemental materials & manuals to support the videos were adapted by a bilingual spanish-speaking licensed clinical social worker from Texas

7

Pilot Testing

A group of Spanish-speaking CHWs underwent the English and Spanish courses and provided feedback to bring the course to readiness

Youth Mental Health

We developed a digital training program to address common anxiety, depression, and interpersonal challenges among adolescents (ages 10–19), with the goal of expanding equitable access to mental health support in school- and community-based settings where young people are already engaged.



Building on 20+ years of research on empirically supported mechanisms of change from the [FIRST Program](#), our two-level stepped care intervention protocol incorporates a quick calming technique and condensed procedure for problem solving.



This brief and flexible intervention was designed for delivery by diverse frontline youth-serving personnel without specialized mental health training (e.g., school staff, after-school personnel, and community or faith-based volunteers).



After pilot testing the training with two groups of U.S. frontline providers, the implementation of the intervention is now being evaluated with youth in a Texas after-school program and in schools in Japan.

Collaborators



BALLMER INSTITUTE



HARVARD
Department of Psychology



Funders



Dr. Mary
Beth Gordon

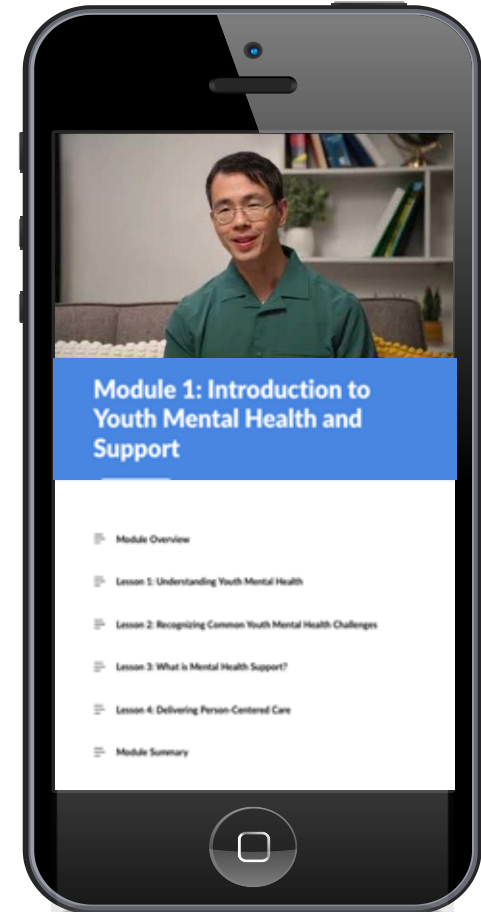
Course 1: Foundational Skills

Course Description

- This course teaches trainees to deliver general mental health support to youth.
- In this course, trainees will:
 - Gain a fundamental understanding of common youth mental health challenges and what effective support entails.
 - Develop essential skills for building rapport with youth (e.g., warmth, acceptance, being genuine, empathy, active listening)
 - Learn to identify and respond to situations involving potential risk of harm when working with young people.

Course Structure

- Sections: 3 Modules with 12 Lessons
- Video Duration: Approximately 1 hour 45 Minutes



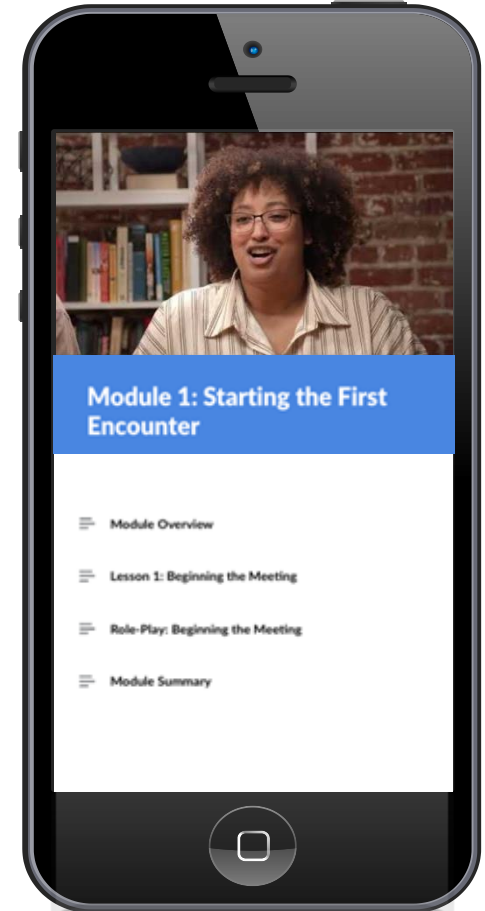
Course 2: First Encounter

Course Description

- The course teaches trainees to deliver the "First Encounter" intervention during an initial meeting with a young person (i.e., the universal first step of care in the EMPOWER Youth intervention protocol).
- In this course, trainees will:
 - Learn to initiate the meeting by building rapport and exploring the youth's presenting problem(s).
 - Learn to teach the brief relaxation skill of Quick Calming to youth in distress.
 - Learn to engage in collaborative decision-making to determine next steps and end the meeting.

Course Structure

- Sections: 3 Modules with 3 Lessons
- Video Duration: Approximately 1 hour 15 Minutes



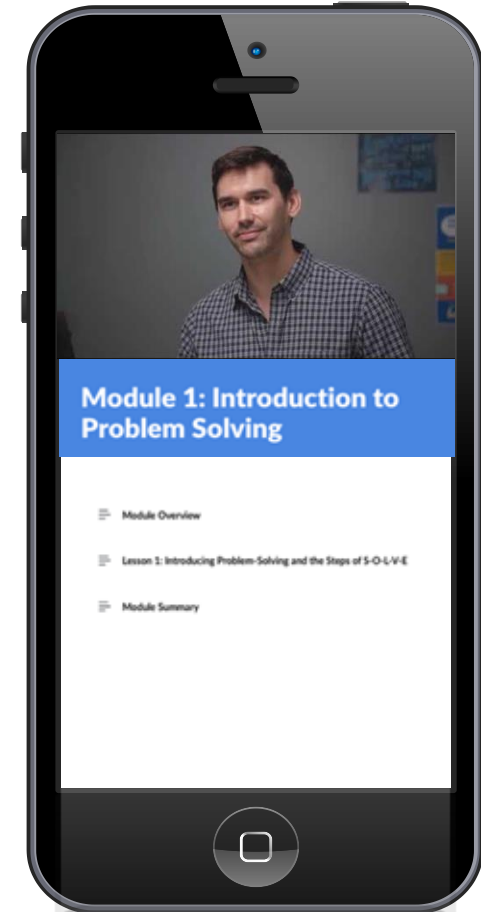
Course 3: Problem Solving

Course Description

- The course teaches trainees to deliver a condensed procedure for Problem Solving across 1–2 additional meetings (i.e., the second step of care in the EMPOWER Youth intervention protocol for youth needing further support).
- In this course, trainees will:
 - Be introduced to the purpose and core components of the Problem Solving technique for young people.
 - Learn to teach the S-O-L-V-E problem-solving procedure during a meeting.
 - Learn to conduct a follow-up meeting on Problem Solving and other best practices for teaching the technique to youth.

Course Structure

- Sections: 3 Modules with 9 Lessons
- Video Duration: Approximately 1 hour 45 Minutes



EMPOWER's Expansion in Texas

Our team is collaborating with multiple stakeholders and sites across Texas to find innovative ways to bridge gaps in access to essential mental health services in low-resource settings towards achieving mental health equity.



Bilingual Training Expansion: Culturally & contextually adapted the 20-hour BA training into Spanish, offering it in both **English and Spanish**.



Workforce Development: Trained **~400 individuals**, including CHWs, case managers, and volunteers, equipping them to deliver BA interventions effectively.

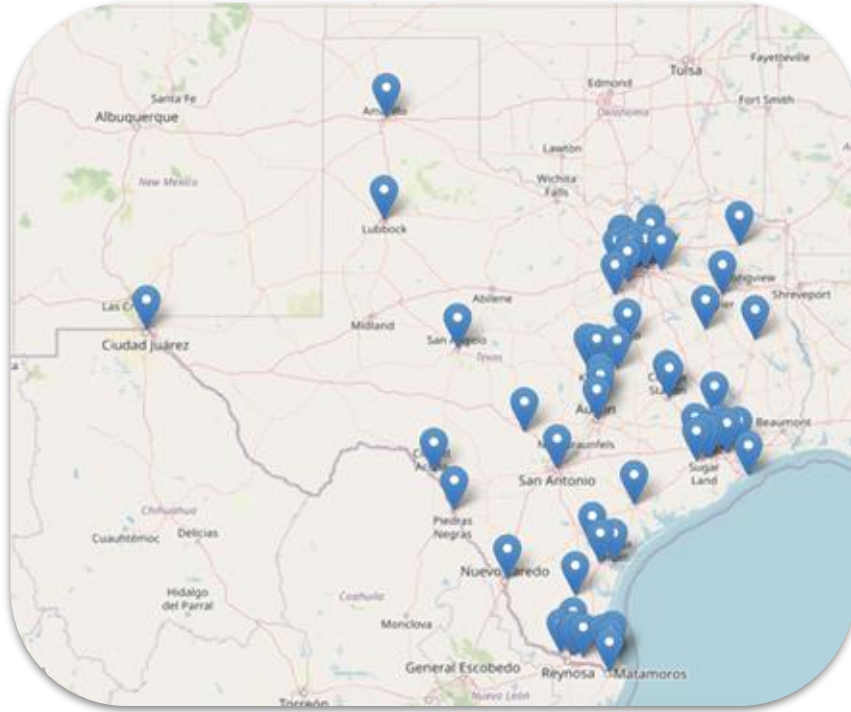


Professional Accreditation: In the process of awarding **2800 Continuing Education Units** to over **140 CHWs** who completed the EMPOWER training.



Statewide Reach: Extended training programs to nearly **60 cities across Texas**, enhancing mental health training accessibility in both urban and rural areas.

EMPOWER's Statewide Reach



Total Trained: 391

Region	Partners	Provider Type	# Trained
North	DSHS, Texas Health Institute	CHWs, Behavioral Health Specialists, Public Health Analysts, Health Services Coordinators	159
Central	Hays County Health Department	Peer Support Specialists, Community Outreach Specialists, Youth Services Program Directors, Behavioral Health Coordinators, Pastors	38
West	Texas A&M	CHWs	38
South	City of San Antonio, Northwest Vista, YWCA Young Women's Christian Association	CHWs, Clinical Program Coordinators, Clinical Program Coordinators, Public Health Officers, Public Health Program Staff	60
RGV	MHP Salud, Lower Rio Grande Valley	CHWs, Social Workers	32
East	DSHS, Texas Health Institute	CHWs, Research Administration Specialists, Community Coordinators	64

Congregational Collective



One solution to the challenges of mental health care is to collaborate with faith communities to train them to provide psychosocial interventions for mild depression and anxiety within churches, while simultaneously establishing two-way referral systems between faith communities and formal mental health providers and systems.

- Congregations are increasingly recognizing the severity of mental health needs and seeking to address this problem.

65%

Families of people with mental illnesses who would like their churches to speak openly about mental illness.



27%

Churches have a program that assists families affected by mental illness.



EMPOWER - Navigators

Members of faith communities receive EMPOWER training for depression. Collaboration with academic institutions and mental health systems for supervision and referral.



18 Churches in
San Antonio,
Texas

Project Goal: Empower faith communities to identify and respond to mental health concerns by integrating proven interventions for depression

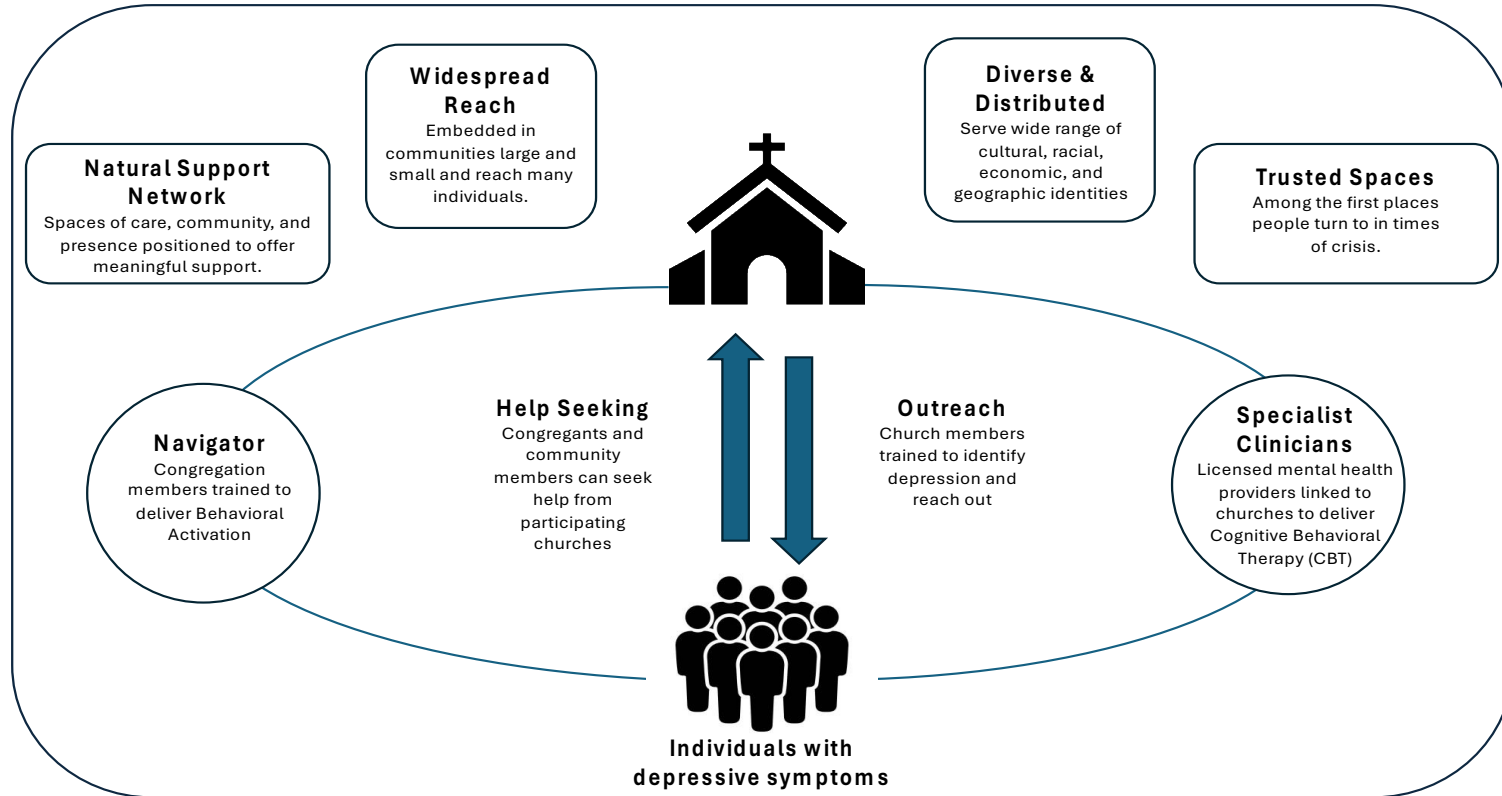




- Multistakeholder collaboration bringing together faith communities, health system and clinicians, and academics
- Training and supporting members of congregations to respond to mental health challenges within their churches
- Empowering faith communities to respond to the mental health crisis



Conceptual Overview



Evaluation of Outcomes in EMPOWER

We use qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate both **effectiveness** and **implementation** outcomes

Effectiveness Outcomes Include



mental health symptoms of community members and their experiences within EMPOWER.

impact on broader community and other stakeholders.

Implementation Outcomes Include

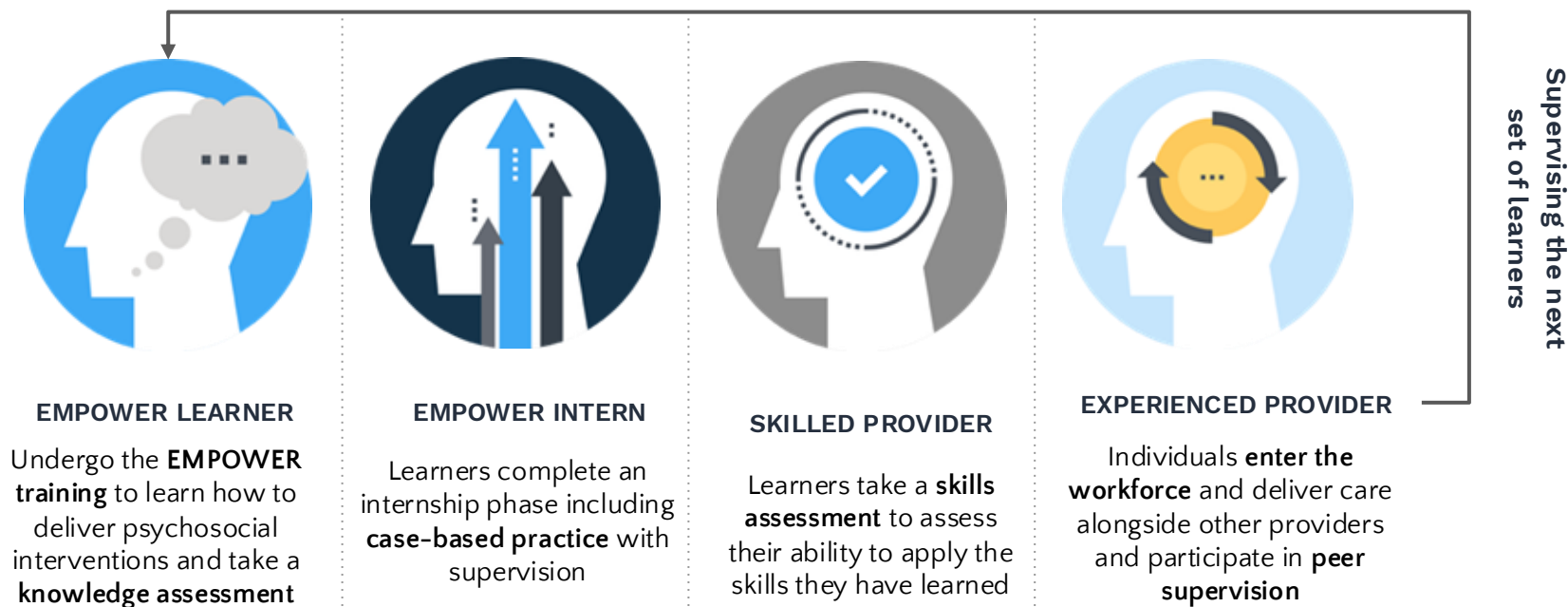


feasibility and acceptability of the EMPOWER intervention in the community

-
- number of **community members reached**
 - number of **mental health sessions delivered**
 - number of **providers trained**
 - **quality of intervention delivery**
 - number of **referrals made**
 - **cost**

Journey of an EMPOWER Provider

EMPOWER adopts an **Accompaniment Model** whereby learners are accompanied on a journey of learning, mastering, and delivering evidence-based psychosocial interventions.





Key Takeaways

Opportunities to train community members towards bringing mental health care out of the clinic.

Active involvement of stakeholders throughout these efforts is critical.

Necessary to adapt these proven models to the local context and culture.

Opportunities for replicating this approach across diverse settings.



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Thank you!



Our Funders



Want to get involved?

Please contact John Naslund to learn more:

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