



**teen**VOGUE



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COURTESY OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CORPS

## Identity

# This New Program Offers a Systemic Solution to America's Youth Mental Health Crisis

The program will provide young people with mental health care, while giving those who are interested in mental health work with training and tangible experience.

BY **ANGIE JAIME**

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According to **a report from the CDC from 2021**, adolescent mental health in the U.S. was worsening in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis which was only exacerbated by the pandemic. The report showed 29% of high school students experienced poor mental health during the 30 days prior to the survey being taken. More than 1 in 5 (22%) students seriously considered attempting suicide. A new initiative formed in a partnership between the Schultz Family Foundation, Pinterest, governors from across 11 states, the US Surgeon General and organizations like the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and AmeriCorps hopes to address the gaps between young people facing mental health challenges and their ability to access resources for care.

The program, called **Youth Mental Health Corps**, kicks off this month and will deploy hundreds of trained peer mental health workers (18 to 24), directly into schools and community organizations, hoping to tackle two sides of the equation simultaneously – providing young people with mental health care, while equipping young people who are interested in mental health work with training and tangible experience.

Funded both by the Schultz Family Foundation and Pinterest, the program will provide training and credentials at no cost to Corps members. It's a unique move for Pinterest among social media platforms, many of which studies show actively contribute to **negative mental health impacts**, such as anxiety and depression, among youth.

Wanji Walcott, Chief Legal and Business Affairs Officer said in a statement to *Teen Vogue*, “According to a study from UC Berkeley, as little as 10 minutes a day with inspiring content on Pinterest helps Gen Z college students to buffer against negative conditions, such as burnout and stress. We take this responsibility seriously and continue to heavily invest in the ways we can support the mental health of young people.” The partnership with Youth Mental Health Corps, Walcott said, is an example of Pinterest’s commitment to the wellbeing of their users.

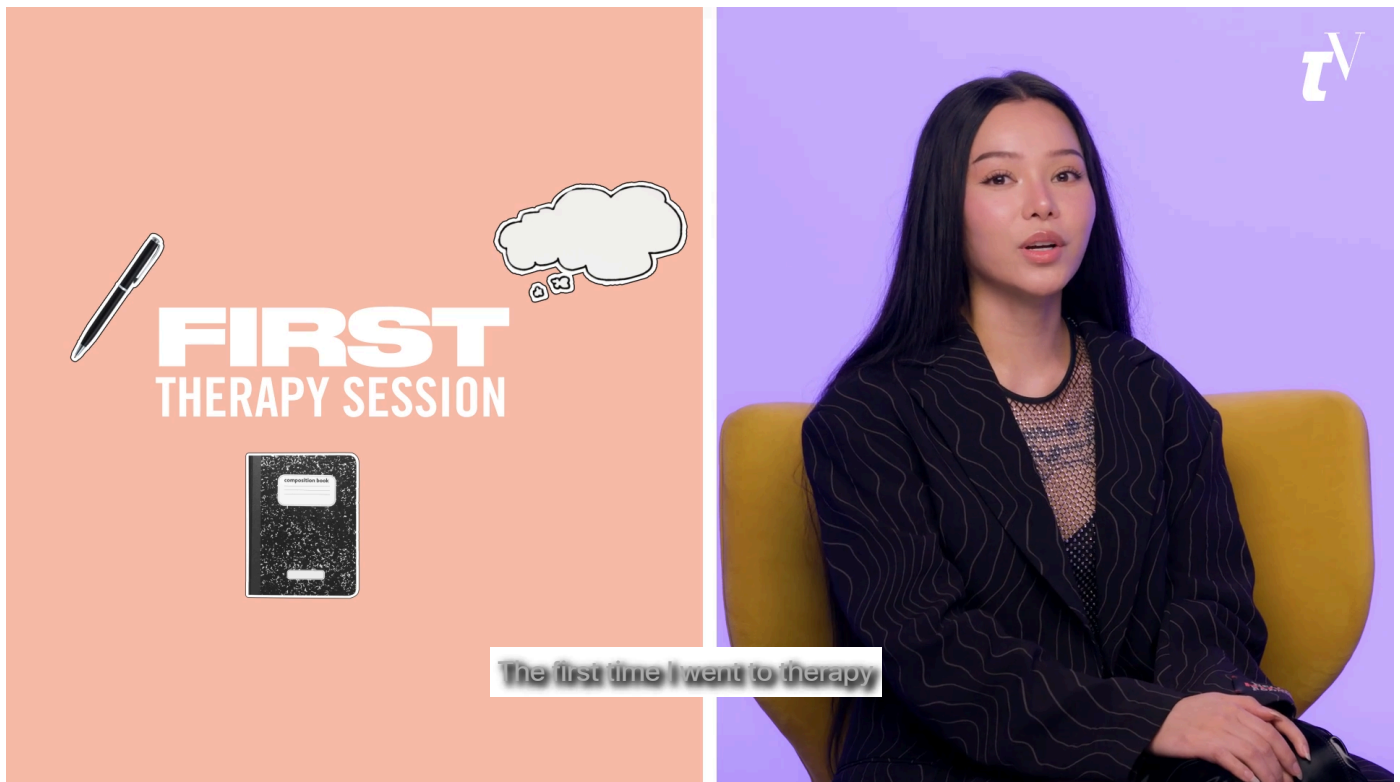
Nelly Grosso, a student and mental health worker, has been providing care for her student peers for the past two years through the Colorado Youth For A Change organization, a group that is a grantee of the Youth Mental Health Corps. Grosso says her work as a peer mentor has been informed by her experiences as a first-generation Latina immigrant to the United States. “I have an opportunity to share the amount of strength and success that can come from the first-gen community, because the stress that we have is impacting our mental health is causing us anxiety, and it's causing us depression. We all come from a bunch of different trauma that has to do with having undocumented parents or the stress of having to navigate things by ourselves or being translators at a young age,” Grosso told *Teen Vogue*.

The students Grosso works with are mostly immigrants from a variety of Latin American countries, and she says the biggest factors which impact their mental health are systemic and structural. “The biggest barrier that they have right now is trying to navigate an entire country and an entire education system, culture, way of thinking all while also learning English. And a lot of my students feel the pressure to succeed, which has really impacted their mental health. At the end of the day, it makes sense, because they're coming from really tough backgrounds,” Grosso said.

Many of her students have experiences with spending time in immigration camps, living with poverty in their country of origin and a variety of systemic setbacks that contribute to poor mental health. Still, Grosso finds their mutually shared backgrounds offer her the ability to connect with her student group on a deeper level. One student Grosso worked with, who seemed to be struggling with anxiety around deciding to go to college, was actually contending with the much larger issue of not being able to afford attending college in the first place. Grosso stepped in with resources she found on her own similar journey.

“The amount of stress that my student had at that moment, had immensely impacted her mental health. Because as first gens we already have this pressure that we have to prove ourselves, not only to our parents, but to our siblings, and also like the community at large, because we're representing a bunch of people,” she said. “I have the opportunity to elevate my seven year old self, my 15 year old self, even my 20 year old self, now at 23. I have the opportunity to keep healing that little girl that felt all that stress all those years ago. And it's really incredible.”

Corps members will be deployed in Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas starting in September 2024. California, Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Utah are set to launch their own Corps in the fall of 2025. Anyone ages 18-24 with a high school diploma can apply at [youthmentalhealthcorps.org](https://youthmentalhealthcorps.org).



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