

# CORE

Career  
Opportunity  
Readiness  
Experience

Operations Manual

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**Interested in integrating CORE into your agency?** Seeking additional information on CORE, or on Vocational Peer Mentor best-practices or developing internships for young people with serious mental health conditions? Contact Dr. Vanessa Klodnick at [Vanessa.Klodnick@thresholds.org](mailto:Vanessa.Klodnick@thresholds.org).

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# WHAT IS CORE?

# WHAT IS CORE?

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CORE is a 15-week intervention that promotes competitive employment among adolescents and young adults with serious mental health diagnoses and is an enhancement to Individual Placement and Support (IPS) (Bond). Competitive employment means a job that anyone can apply for that pays at least minimum wage. CORE is intended for young people who are not securing or maintaining competitive employment through IPS, lack entry level job skills and confidence in their ability to maintain employment and are experiencing the “why try” effect based on their previous struggles with work and school.

CORE is not meant to replace IPS, but rather to strengthen young people’s skills and confidence – leading them to become more successful in IPS services.

## **CORE has 4 Phases in Implementation:**

- 1** Engagement
- 2** Interactive Classroom-Based Workshops
- 3** Paid Community-Based Internship
- 4** Transition to the Supported Employment & Education (IPS) Team

A CORE team is staffed with a Coordinator and Vocational Peer Mentors. The coordinator works closely with clinical programs to identify eligible participants, as well as employers to carve out internships across a variety of industries. The CORE Coordinator and Peer Mentors work together with young people, employers, mental health providers, family and other identified key players to support young people with having a positive experience with CORE.

Young people with serious mental health conditions often experience disrupted education. CORE supports participants’ learning and growth by teaching entry-level job skills while building confidence and self-efficacy. See diagram of CORE Theoretical Model on the next page.

# WHAT IS CORE?

## CORE Theoretical Model

### Many Factors Impact Young Person Employment:

Onset & treatment history, including psychiatric hospitalizations, incarceration & residential care, that may disrupt vocational development

Stigma, discrimination & struggles in classroom and early vocational experiences

Child & adult system policies & practices; misattuned with transition to adulthood, including lack of vocational evidence-based practice for age group

Social network, employment, resources & benefits use



### CORE improves:

- Motivation & beliefs about work
- Soft skills/cultural capital
- Service engagement
- Self-efficacy & self-determination
- Financial literacy & perceptions of benefits
- Communication & organization skills
- Emotional regulation & coping skills



### Which leads to:

- Increased IPS Supported Employment engagement
- Increased job attainment
- Increased job maintenance

# WHAT IS CORE?

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## **CORE Sustainability & Translatability**

CORE was first developed at Thresholds, the largest community mental health provider in Illinois. Thresholds has a nationally recognized and expanding Youth & Young Adult Services (YAYAS) division that actively contributes knowledge to both practice and scientific communities. YAYAS blends evidence-based practices from child and adult service sectors to engage and support young people with a variety of serious mental health needs in meeting their goals. [To learn more, visit the Thresholds YAYAS website.](#)

In the last 40 years, Thresholds has partnered with researchers to implement, test and sustain Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Supported Employment, an evidence-based practice that promotes employment among people with serious mental health diagnoses. Thresholds IPS teams successfully place over 400 individuals a year into competitive employment. Thresholds annually scores high fidelity in IPS and was the first provider in the state to apply and earn high fidelity in the Young Adult IPS Fidelity Scale in 2021 (Marbacher).

## **History**

From 2013-2015, Thresholds YAYAS piloted an IPS adaptation for young adults in partnership with UMASS Transition to Adulthood Center for Research (NIDILRR H133B140040). This IPS adaptation included Supported Education, Peer Mentors and a career focus (Ellison et al.) and targeted those with serious complex trauma, residential treatment histories and compromised education attainment. Although many of these young people wanted a job, they struggled with employment despite adapted-IPS support.

Eshawn Spencer, former Thresholds IPS Director designed CORE in 2016 to improve IPS success with young adults with histories including serious mental health symptoms, psychiatric hospitalizations, residential treatment and complex trauma. Spencer is a nationally recognized leader in integrating adolescent and young adult vocational services into community mental health services, and is a certified IPS Fidelity Assessor.

CORE evaluation outcomes revealed positive outcomes among CORE participants, and in 2018 Thresholds was awarded a NIDILRR field-initiated research grant to further study and build materials so that other programs could replicate the CORE Model.

# WHAT IS CORE?

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## **CORE Sustainability & Translatability**

This most recent iteration of CORE was implemented, evaluated and refined by a cross-disciplinary team that included the Thresholds IPS Program Director and Assistant Director, YAYAS Research & Innovation Director and Assistant Directors and CORE Coordinator. This team consulted with an internal steering committee and an external research advisor committee who helped shape CORE implementation and evaluation between 2019-2023. The CORE research project produced this manual, appendices, training materials, conference presentations and journal articles—which are available on the [Thresholds website](#).

Although each state in the country documents and bills for Medicaid differently, this guide helps providers identify funding codes to bill for CORE services. State level departments of rehabilitation services typically have funding for service models that directly impact employment among individuals with disabilities, which includes CORE.

## **CORE Philosophy & General Practice Principles**

The CORE Model lives at the intersection between mental health and employment. CORE adapts to support participants' needs and circumstances in real-time. CORE uses a transition-to-adulthood, developmentally attuned practice called Discovery (Klodnick et al.) to engage young people and support their career development. Discovery blends *Resiliency* and *Recovery* with *Emerging Adulthood Theory* (Arnett). Resiliency-oriented services are strengths-based, tailored and specialized, multisystem coordinated, and family focused (Stroul and Blau), while recovery-oriented services embrace self-determination, choice and control over services, and peer support (SAMHSA).

Emerging Adulthood theory suggests that young adults have the most opportunity for change across multiple life domains (e.g., work, school, living situation, relationships) during a time when they have the least social commitments (e.g., marriage, mortgage) so that they can focus on self-exploration, identity development, and finding belonging in community. A Discovery approach supports young adults in choosing their path (and changing this path often), building self-awareness of personal strengths and competencies, engaging in shared decision making with social network support, and experiencing the natural consequences of one's choices.

Discovery promotes learning through doing, reflecting on learning and increasing self-awareness of who one is and who one wants to become. CORE is Discovery-oriented because it includes a cohort experience so that young people can experience risk together and support each other; real world work experiences via an internship to promote basic and soft job skills, and reflection and self-awareness building through Peer Support.



# WHAT IS CORE?

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The CORE program values participant self-determination. The team works to ensure that young people have a voice in their program experiences. Insistent pressure or attempts to convince a young person to enroll in CORE from clinical teams, IPS staff or family members because they are perceived to be a “good fit” violates the voluntary nature of the program and leads to poor engagement and outcomes.

## **Considerations to Increase Equity, Diversity & Inclusion during CORE Implementation**

Practicing anti-racism and anti-ableism approaches to address social and self-biases and stigma is imperative to CORE’s mission, which includes:

1. Collaboration as a team and with program staff is an active, intentional and ongoing process.
2. Power differentials and dynamics among staff and participants should be reflected on and assessed regularly.
3. Discrimination of any kind, including microaggressions experienced by CORE team members and participants, is directly addressed and appropriate action is determined.

## **Some important considerations to reflect on within the context of CORE:**

Demographic differences between CORE staff and participants can be a barrier to awareness of disparities within the program and participants’ experiences.

- CORE team seeks to continuously develop this awareness and reflect on ways to improve.
- Identity and how it relates to mental health and work should be explored as a group and individually on an ongoing basis.
- CORE gives participants the tools to self-advocate at work and on behalf of participants when unjust or harmful actions are observed or reported.
- CORE seeks to ensure that an internship site is a positive, safe and affirming environment for each individual before placement.
- CORE considers the ways in which mental health and other forms of disability can be a barrier to participation. The CORE team works to be aware of these barriers and finds ways to adapt to participants’ needs.
- Participants with access to the most resources (a supportive clinical team, natural supports, education and work history, ease of transportation) often “thrive” the most in workshops and are more likely to complete their internships.
- When creating connections in the community for internship sites, the CORE team is aware of:
  - Potential risks of discrimination and power differentials between internship sites and CORE interns
  - Policies and practices around equity and inclusion and accommodations
  - The social and physical environments of potential work settings
  - The skills, expectations and learning processes required for the work participants will be doing



# CORE TEAM

# CORE TEAM

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The CORE team is made up of a full-time CORE Coordinator and one or two part-time Vocational Peer Mentors. The team is supported by an agency leader who is ideally embedded in a vocational or career services division. At Thresholds, where CORE was piloted, the CORE Coordinator is supervised by the Assistant Program Director in the IPS Department.

## CORE Coordinator

The CORE Coordinator's primary responsibilities are implementing the CORE Model, supervising Vocational Peer Mentors and building and sustaining partnerships with CORE internship sites. The coordinator also fosters partnership between the Vocational Peer Mentors and the IPS and clinical teams. See Job Description in [Appendix F.](#)

## Development & Supervision

The CORE Coordinator is ideally supervised by a leader within an agency's Employment Division who is a champion of peer support and has knowledge of peer values, ethics and ideals. This supervision experience is crucial to ensuring the coordinator can effectively support the peer mentors on their team.

## The CORE Coordinator must deeply understand & value Peer Support

The coordinator should seek out and participate in trainings and learning collaboratives on Peer Supervision on an ongoing basis. During the CORE research project at Thresholds, the CORE Coordinator participated in a monthly learning collaborative with other supervisors of peer providers to develop skills to be more successful and educated in their role. See list of available online resources below.

## Resources for Effective Supervision of Peer Roles:

- [Center for Behavioral Health Knowledge: Young Adult Peer Mentor Supervision Tools & Resources](#)
- [Bridging the Gap Peer Kit](#)



# CORE TEAM

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## Vocational Peer Mentors

Vocational Peer Mentors (**VPMs**) use their lived and living experiences with mental health conditions and navigating the workforce to provide validation, empathy and hope while also empowering, advocating with, and role modeling vocational skills. Peer Mentors are key collaborators and guides for navigating mental health experiences, cultivating job skills and interdependence.

A CORE team has two part-time (or one full-time) **VPMs**. VPMs provide support within the community, which includes: accompanying participants, checking in, motivating, planning, transporting, coaching and educating—based on individual needs and goals.

VPMs are involved in all 4 CORE Phases, playing a critical role in initial engagement through participant screening, enrollment and ongoing outreach. In the Interactive Workshop Phase, VPMs co-facilitate workshops by leading activities and supporting participant engagement—though the VPMs' primary role should not be enforcing participation. VPMs are key supports to participants and internship sites during the Paid Community-Based Internship Phase, and they support engagement in the Transition to the IPS Team Phase upon CORE completion.

## Vocational Peer Mentor Development

Vocational Peer Mentors participate in a weekly individual supervision meeting with the CORE Coordinator. In this meeting, the coordinator engages VPMs through:

- Facilitating a general check in about areas both in and outside of work, including positive experiences
- Discussing CORE participants individually by addressing strengths, concerns, growth opportunities, etc.
- Reflecting on VPM's approach to 1:1 support with participants and providing constructive feedback as needed
- Providing space for any questions, comments or ideas
- Assigning projects and collaborating on action steps for the week

VPMs also participate in a monthly learning collaborative with other peer providers at the agency to process experiences of the role and learn skills. VPMs should seek outside trainings including state accredited peer credentialing.

# CORE TEAM

## CORE Team Collaboration

The CORE Team meets weekly to review each participant's engagement and progress in CORE and strategize where additional support is needed. The CORE team communicates frequently via text, phone and email. During supervision and team meetings, the CORE Coordinator proactively co-creates tasks with VPMs to delegate responsibility for tasks.

## CORE Integration into Mental Health Agency

CORE can be integrated on an IPS team, next to an IPS team or within a multidisciplinary team (such as Coordinated Specialty Care) that has an integrated Supported Education & Employment Specialist (SEES). At Thresholds, CORE was implemented next to a Youth & Young Adult specific IPS team that served 6 programs with unique populations including residential and transitional living programs and community based/coordinated specialty care teams. See diagram below.

### Emerge

- Designed for 17-26 year olds with a variety of mental health needs.
- Multidisciplinary team that provides services in community, home & office

### MindStrong

- Early Intervention for 13-25 year olds at clinical high risk for psychosis.
- Coordinated Specialty Care for 14-40 year olds with a recent onset of psychosis.
- Services in community, home & office.

### Mothers Project

- Community-based transitional apartment living for 17-21 year olds in DCFS care & 16-24 year olds experiencing homelessness
- Linkage services for families experiencing homelessness 18+ years old
- Counseling for youth experiencing homelessness in the community

### YAP

- Community-based residential & coordinated care for a 16-21 year olds, referred from DCFS, juvenile justice, school districts or Family Support Program.
- Therapeutic Day High School for 16-22 year olds referred from community & YAYAS programs

### REACH

- Community-based transitional apartment living with comprehensive services for 18-21 year olds with DCFS or juvenile justice involvement

## COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

## RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

# CORE TEAM

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## CORE Team Collaboration with Others

CORE was implemented at Thresholds across programs that each had their own identity, structure, culture, target population and key practices. When CORE is introduced to a new program, the CORE team must actively seek to understand the new program's culture and characteristics, as well as the types of support that are available and missing. By better understanding programs, the CORE team can more effectively advocate for participants. The CORE Coordinator is responsible for building and maintaining strong partnerships with program managers.

Partnering with the clinical programs includes following-up with clinical teams and ensuring that important information is shared properly between teams. In the case that a participant requires extra support, teams must work collaboratively to identify the most helpful supports and strategies to best engage the young person.

### To partner effectively with clinical teams, the CORE Coordinator...



Regularly meets with program managers



Joins program and team meetings at least monthly



Sends emails regularly to program management & program staff listserv with updates on CORE engagement and outcomes



Facilitates CORE enrollment meetings



Engages in regular communication with participants and identifies natural supports and key clinical staff to share information and solicit support.

## Engaging Family & Other Identified Key Supports

Families can offer insight into a young person's needs and experiences. For young people who have loved ones involved in their care, it can be beneficial to include their identified family contact in the process of enrolling and participating in CORE.

# CORE TEAM

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## **Mental Health Disclosure within CORE Team**

**Mental health-related disclosure of participants should be handled with discretion, professionalism and consideration for the purpose it serves for the young person.**

During workshops, CORE participants will develop a support plan alongside Vocational Peer Mentors to prepare for entering the workplace. In these workshops VPMs lead discussions and provide information around mental health awareness, advocacy, disclosure and accommodations.

## **Guidance for Disclosure**

- CORE should use a strengths-based and non-clinical approach to disclosure
- Discussion of participants' mental health, personal circumstances or other situations should focus specifically on how it relates to their participation in CORE
- Participants' privacy should be prioritized before disclosing to others— ask:
  - “Is this information or detail necessary and helpful to share with this person?”
  - “Who needs to know this and why?”
- Since CORE is not a clinical team, any clinical information that is relevant to supporting participants should be shared by clinical staff with the CORE team
- VPMs should check in with participants about their comfort and boundaries around disclosing personal information
- Points of communication should be delegated clearly among staff. Lack of clarity causes inconsistency, which leads to stress and confusion for staff, participants and internship sites.

## **Integrating CORE into an IPS Team**

IPS is predicated on the notion that job readiness training is not needed to be successful with entry level competitive employment. CORE is an enhancement to IPS, created specifically for young adults with limited employment experience who have not been successful with IPS services. To effectively integrate CORE into an agency, it must be championed by both IPS and clinical leadership to support implementation together.

During fidelity visits, CORE should be included as an add-on program that is meant to boost IPS engagement and employment outcomes. The CORE Coordinator and other champions should explain the purpose and outcomes of CORE to IPS Fidelity Assessors. CORE should not be scored as part of IPS on fidelity scale. It is a separate program for a unique target population of young adults with limited employment experience.



# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

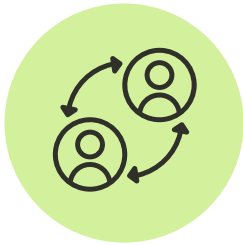
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# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## CORE Occurs Across 4 Phases:



**Phase 1:** Engagement



**Phase 2:** Interactive Classroom-Based Workshops



**Phase 3:** Paid Community-Based Internship



**Phase 4:** Transition to the Supported Employment & Education (IPS) Team  
(or other identified career/education opportunity)

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## PHASE 1: CORE Engagement

CORE includes an intensive pre-enrollment application process, followed by outreach and connecting with young people and clinical teams, and collaboration with a decision committee to identify the cohort of participants.

To recruit participants, the CORE team utilizes a mix of email announcements, in person/virtual info sessions, and in-person kick off celebration events. These sessions include an introduction to CORE, and the opportunity for potential participants and staff to get to know the CORE team and ask questions. The CORE team provides a FAQ sheet (See [Appendix I](#)) and a flier with a QR code that links to more information.

During this phase, the CORE Coordinator joins clinical team meetings to describe CORE and answer questions. The CORE team will also attend regularly occurring program activities and events where participants will be, including cookouts and picnics, Advisory Board meetings and town halls to share information about the upcoming CORE cycle. CORE flyers with QR codes are also posted in common areas at programs and residences.

The most powerful recruitment tool is participant success with CORE. Through implementing CORE, both staff and participants in the programs will see or hear about CORE's positive impact on young people, which boosts CORE referrals and enrollment.

## The CORE Application

CORE uses an online application that assesses a young person's interest and motivation to identify if CORE is right for them. See [Appendix D](#). This application must be filled out by the young person (not their clinical staff or family member). CORE is predicated on the notion that a young person's self-determination is essential and completing the application is the first activity to demonstrate this motivation.

The application has questions including basic information and availability, access to technology, education and work history and personal and work interests. The goal is to determine a potential participant's availability, their interest in the intervention and to understand previous barriers to competitive employment. The CORE Coordinator and Peer Mentors contact applicants to ask further questions to learn more about applicant motivation, career interests, employment barriers and key supports.

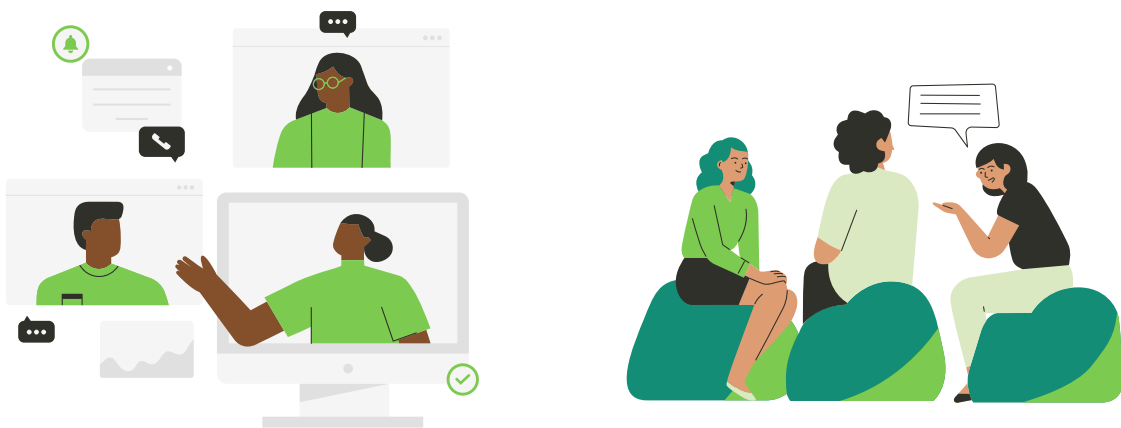
# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

## Participant Selection

CORE phases happen in cycles, where each group completes the Interactive Class-Room Based Workshops and the Paid Community-Based Internship phase during a 15-week time frame.

**CORE accepts between 6-10 participants per cycle.** Depending on the size of the agency, it can be challenging to provide CORE to all those who are interested at once. During the Engagement Phase, the CORE team must connect with clinical teams, potential participants and other supports to ensure that young people and their staff are aware of the expectations of the CORE program. This partnership process is also crucial to the CORE team, to gain awareness of young people's barriers and strengths related to being successful in CORE.

At Thresholds, CORE receives approximately 20 applications for each cycle, and typically 12-15 of those were still interested in participating after being screened. Some were immediately referred to: (1) IPS for connection to competitive employment or (2) the Supported Education Specialist for support with post-secondary education enrollment. Others continued to meet with their clinical team to explore career goals. Through practice, the CORE team has found that when someone other than the potential participant completed the CORE application (e.g., parent, mental health professional), that young person will not be successful in CORE.



After the application screening process, the CORE team meets individually with each participant to further assess career interests and supports. These conversations are a time to assess any areas of concern (e.g., housing or child care needs), areas where further information is needed (e.g., previous work history or connection with IPS), the potential participant's understanding of CORE expectations and their willingness to discuss and identify accommodations.

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## CORE Participant Eligibility

CORE is open to all young people enrolled in services for youth and young adults. The philosophy of CORE is that young people who will benefit most will receive access, and those who are a better fit for IPS should be connected to an IPS team/specialist. Below are some helpful considerations in determining participant success in CORE. Most areas are intended to help determine when waiting until a future CORE cycle may best benefit the young person. This list is not exhaustive and can be adapted to fit the needs of your organization.

- Young people who show self-determination and commitment to participate in CORE
- Completed high school or equivalent, or are nearing the end of high school (e.g., therapeutic high school transition students)
- Regularly engaged in clinical programming
- Capacity to travel to workshops and internships with minimal support
- Equity across programs and service lines
- Not currently employed or enrolled in IPS
- If a potential participant states they are currently or were recently employed:
- Check with young person, clinical staff and IPS Team about the details of employment. Often folks have insight to what else is going on and CORE is still a better fit. Some areas to assess include:
  - Was the job only maintained for less than 30 days?
  - What led to them leaving the job?
  - Why are they applying to CORE if currently employed?
- Ideally, participants must not be currently working. Those who are should be connected with IPS team.

## Assess Areas of Concern

**Be thoughtful of CORE team capacity:** It is important to identify what level of support will be needed by each young person in their internship and during workshops. Consider how many participants may require higher levels of support from the CORE team (e.g., 1-2).

## Areas of Consideration

- Identified accommodations
- Mental health and other support needs
- Access to housing, food and other basic needs
- Smartphone and other technology access
- Potential barriers to engagement and participation—including how many participants with extensive barriers the team can take on per cycle
- Based on individual and group factors, is the current cycle a good time for this participant to succeed in CORE?

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## **CORE Support Plan Meeting**

During the Engagement Phase, CORE team members connect with young people and their key supports, including clinical teams and identified family members to review CORE expectations and to discuss and identify CORE facilitators and barriers that will inform the **CORE Support & Accommodation Plan**. See [Appendix B](#). The support plan meeting serves to further determine whether or not CORE is a good fit for the young person right now.

## **What does the CORE team need to know to best support the participant?**

- Program expectations and any participant current restrictions (e.g., safety, substance use, housing instability)
- Where the participant lives and where they will be commuting from to participate in CORE (e.g., home, residential site, school, etc.)
- Any other barriers to participation including changes in housing, transportation, child care or other lack of resources
- Current staff and family contact information
- Participant availability and schedules, including clinical program participation requirements (e.g., some young people had to meet with their teams in the community twice a week for approximately 1 hour each time; others were enrolled in the therapeutic high school which had specific onsite and virtual requirements)
- Participant strengths, motivations and goals, communication preferences and distress/stress signs so that the CORE team can partner with young people and their supports to manage CORE-related struggles
- Significant life events (e.g., recent hospitalizations, losses, pregnancy, behavioral concerns)

## **What does the CORE team *not* need to know from the clinical teams?**

- Non-urgent personal conflicts or situations that could be explained by participants
- Clinical assessments, change in medication status, etc., unless there is a direct concern of impact on CORE and internship participation.
- Reports on non-relevant historical events such as past conflicts, traumas, and family history.
- Biases and sensationalized details of diagnoses and/or other mental health or life events
- Excessive personal information that is not applicable to providing CORE support, such as young person relationship status or household issues
- Opinions on young people's development, such as gender expression, interests, appearance, etc.

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

## Expectations for Participation

Rigid expectations and policies may not be applicable or helpful to participants, given the varied circumstances that occur for young people and programs during a given 15-week cycle period. CORE facilitators should determine their attendance policies based on our recommendations of things to consider and what works best for your program/agency and participants:

- The workshop and internship phases are fundamental to CORE. Consistent participation and attendance within these phases is critical for individual success.
- Acknowledge the intensity and duration of the program starting at the engagement phase. Consider how participants would benefit CORE at the present moment and what support is needed for their success.
- Look at accommodations and considerations for attendance including potential barriers. CORE should emphasize an individualized approach to best support and set participants up for success in the program.
- Consider and explain what expectations mean within the context of CORE being a voluntary program. Include information and guidelines for consequences of missed attendance including loss of pay, and opportunities to make up for missed sessions or shifts.
- Provide guidelines on how staff can support attendance as well as protocols for communicating with internship sites.

## Orientation Meeting

CORE officially kicks off with an orientation meeting, which is a combination of “housekeeping” items (i.e., signing consent forms, filling out W9s), and icebreaker activities for participants and the CORE team to get to know one another. It is also considered a trial run for traveling to the workshops, and the last major recruitment effort prior to CORE start. At this point, many young people are still not fully sold on or committed to enrolling into CORE. **The orientation meeting is an opportunity to learn more about these young people and show them how CORE can help them reach their career goals.**



### Tips for a successful Orientation

- This is a celebration!
- Always have food and snacks
- Make the atmosphere fun and inviting (with games, music)
- Small gifts, swag and gift cards are always appreciated



# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## PHASE 2: CORE Interactive Workshops

The second phase of CORE consists of seven engaging in-person workshops. These workshops happen in a conference room setting with the new CORE cycle participants. The main purpose of these workshops is to help participants prepare for their internships through confidence building. They refresh and develop job skills, practice the basics of showing up on time, interact with others and learn about navigating the workplace. The workshops offer experiential learning, sharing from real life examples, coping skills building, conversations around disclosure and mental health experiences and navigating accommodations and support needs in the workplace.

Each workshop is scheduled for two hours, with 30 minutes dedicated to individual check-ins with Peer Mentors or work on completing tasks independently or in small groups. All workshops are adaptable to the needs of participants. Some activities may be engaging with some cycles and flop in others. To be adaptive, the CORE team needs to understand the learning styles of the participants and feel out the “vibe” of groups by offering multiple mediums to deliver information. This includes learning and adapting to the needs and comfort levels of different participants. Details and facilitation recommendations are available in the CORE Facilitation guide (to be released in 2023).

**Workshop 1:** Building community, getting to know each other, learning expectations, exploring job interests, understanding “what is work?”

**Workshop 2:** Financial literacy & budgeting

**Workshop 3:** Exploring workplace etiquette in three stages: before going to work, during work and after work

**Workshop 4:** Navigating workplace scenarios, including: how to best respond to difficult situations and conversations, interviewing and what not to do through use of role plays and reviewing video clips of different examples

**Workshop 5:** Managing mental health on the job

**Workshop 6:** Workplace accommodations, disclosure—if, when and how to disclose, support plan and 1:1 sessions

**Workshop 7:** Mock interviews with community partners and celebrating the end of workshops! Review and prepare for internships. Any last-minute prep discussions and scheduling of 1:1s, internship interviews and more

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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Additionally, there is time built into each workshop for 1:1 support and tasks with VPMs and CORE Coordinator, see [Appendix B](#). **Some areas of focus for these meetings include:**

- Building rapport and relationships with participants
- Following up on logistical needs (e.g., transportation, hours comfortable working, location, basic needs)
- Reinforcing skills learned in the workshop
- Utilizing strategic sharing
- In-depth debriefing and processing of information learned
- Completing interest inventories and talking about career and education goals
- Discussing interests and internship site options
- Creating and editing resumes
- Practicing answering interview questions
- Preparing participants for internships through processing potential conundrums

## **PHASE 3: Paid Community-Based Internship (10 hours weekly for 12 weeks)**

The internship phase is an opportunity for participants to gain hands-on experience thru working directly in the community. The goal of this phase is to find and place participants in internships that fit their individual interests and needs, while providing them with support to develop skills that they can take into the world of competitive employment.

CORE internships are 8-12 weeks long, approximately 10-hours a week for a total of 120 hours. Participants are paid an hourly stipend wage, this amount should be determined based on agency discretion. CORE interns receive checks every 2 weeks, just like typical entry level employment. Internship hours, schedules and expectations should be established between the participant, the Internship Site Supervisor and the CORE Coordinator or partnering Vocational Peer Mentor. See CORE Intern & Site Supervisor Commitment in [Appendix A](#). Hours are tracked on a regular basis through the use of time sheets, that are filled out by the intern and signed by the internship site supervisor. These hours logs are reviewed and submitted by the CORE Coordinator biweekly in order for the intern to receive their biweekly stipend.

Ideally, internships should begin within a month of workshop completion in order to maintain the young person's motivation and success with their internship. Delays with internship start dates can be part of the process and are often related to internship site needs, but also can be related to the needs or circumstances of participants.



# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## Internship Interviews

CORE participants participate in a formal interview with the Internship site Supervisor, and if applicable/relevant, a member of the CORE team. This interview is an excellent way for the Supervisor and CORE participant to mutually get to know each other, to determine if the internship is a good fit for the young person, and to further identify what key internship activities and responsibilities that the CORE participant will have on the internship site.

## Supporting Participants During Internships

Participants will continue to meet with their VPM each week to receive ongoing support and skills development. Some areas that are addressed during this time include:

- Processing internship
  - Managing expectations
  - Identifying areas of need and growth
  - Support navigating sticky situations and conundrums
- Reinforcing skills learned in workshops
- Coach on how to help prepare for the transition to IPS
  - Creating and editing resumes
  - Other skills and strengths
- Creating, updating, and adapting **Internship Support and Accommodation Plan**—the CORE team will develop individualized support plans for participants (refer to CORE Facilitation Guide for more details on this development).
- Throughout internship, the CORE Coordinator and VPMs collaborate and communicate with respective clinical teams, providing relevant updates, asking for suggestions and working together to provide the most optimal experience for the participant.

## Mental Health Disclosure with Internship Sites

To limit inadvertent, harmful and stigmatizing disclosure in order to support CORE participant internship success:

- The CORE Coordinator discusses disclosure with internship site supervisors, including how to introduce participants to coworkers—before the internship starts.
- CORE staff presence at internship sites should bring minimal disruption or attention to participants. Obvious staff presence distinguishes the participant from their coworkers and can be othering.
- Peer Mentors and the CORE Coordinator clearly plan visits with participants prior to going to an internship site.

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## Developing & Maintaining CORE Internships

From the Engagement Phase, the CORE Coordinator begins building relationships with potential employers, prioritizing sites that are nearby participants' homes and aligned with their preferences. In order to be an internship site, the agency must sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in connection with the internship site, see example in [Appendix G](#).

Maintaining strong relationships with internship sites is critical to the success and sustainability of CORE. The coordinator engages in regular communication with internship site supervisors to ensure that the internship experience is positive for both the participant and the site. The support needs of both participants and internship sites will likely shift throughout the internship phase and should be continuously assessed and adapted on an individualized basis. For more in-depth guidance on internship development, refer to the CORE Facilitation Guide (2023).



## Celebration!

It is critical to celebrate career-related successes for young people who have struggled with work and school due to their mental health challenges. CORE hosts a celebration at the completion of a cycle to celebrate all CORE participants, internship site supervisors, clinical team members, and other key supports who supported CORE participant success. This celebration can be virtual or in-person, and should include both CORE participant and Internship site reflections. Also, inviting agency leaders, community partners, or funders to a CORE cycle celebration can increase buy-in and support for sustaining CORE.

# THE CORE EXPERIENCE

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## **PHASE 4: Transition to the Supported Employment & Education (IPS) Team or other identified career/education opportunity**

As a career readiness program, all participants transition from CORE onto the next step in their career journeys. This typically happens when a young person has completed their internship, and then transitions from CORE to IPS services within the organization. Although, this transition may look different for some—for example, a participant may choose to skip the internship and pursue a competitive employment opportunity at the end of the workshop phase. A successful CORE transition may also look like a participant choosing to pursue an opportunity in post-secondary education or a trade program.

### **Considerations for Transition**

- CORE participants get connected to IPS services about 8 weeks into their internship phase.
- CORE sends a info form to IPS with information about the young person, that should include: information about their experience in CORE, their personal interests and areas of support needs and any other relevant considerations
  - IPS evaluates the participant's situation and comes up with a transition plan, ensuring time to transition each case and build relationships with participants
- CORE Coordinator sets up mini meetings to connect with Employment Specialists, clinical Team Leads and IPS Team Leads
  - Consistency, including presence and use of peer support is crucial during this transition process





# APPENDICES

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# APPENDICIES



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# CORE Intern & Site Supervisor Commitment

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**Instructions for use:** CORE Intern & Internship supervisor will complete as much of this form as possible together as their agreement in supporting on another.

## Internship Details & Contact Information

Core Intern Name \_\_\_\_\_

Core Intern Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Supervisor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Supervisor Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Location \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Length \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Start Date \_\_\_\_\_

Internship End Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Any Additional Notes

## Weekly Work Schedule

Day of Week	Hours
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

# CORE Intern & Site Supervisor Commitment

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## Intern Tasks:

1	
2	
3	
4	

## Intern Supervisor Supports:

1	
2	
3	
4	

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (CORE participant name), commit to completing this internship, including showing up to my internship site on-time and ready to complete assigned tasks. If I have questions, I will contact my Internship Site Supervisor (name & contact info above).

<b>CORE Participant Signature</b>	
<b>Internship Site Supervisor</b>	
<b>CORE Coordinator</b>	

# CORE Internship Accommodations & Support Plan

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Complete this section with participants in Workshop #5 during 1:1s

Participant name & pronouns: \_\_\_\_\_

Peer Mentor name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What if any concerns do you have about starting your internship? Check all that apply:

- ☐ Communicating with team/customers
- ☐ Making it to the site on time, as scheduled
- ☐ Staying focused
- ☐ Time management
- ☐ Coping with stress/mental health
- ☐ Job skills
- ☐ Other?

**Describe:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What symptoms or experiences do you think you might need accommodations for?**

(anxiety, difficulty concentrating, distracting thoughts, following instructions, environmental or other triggers, depression, socializing, other)

**How do you think these things could affect your internship?**

(feeling overwhelmed, social anxiety, reacting when triggered, trouble communicating needs, calling off on difficult days, other)

**What are some early warning signs that you're feeling overwhelmed or struggling and need more support?**

(sleep problems, feeling irritable, increased use of substances, low motivation, wanting to call off of work, other)

**Identify three signs that you may be in need of more support:**

**What coping strategies may help relieve mental health symptoms that arise before or during work (anxiety, stress, depression, anger, etc.)?**

(progressive relaxation, creating a positive coping thought, use of pleasing tactile sensations, deep breathing, other)

**What helps you succeed with getting tasks done?**

(listening to music, short intervals, to-do lists, written instructions, other)



# CORE Internship Accommodations & Support Plan

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Complete this section with participants in workshop #6 during 1:1s

Participant name & pronouns: \_\_\_\_\_

Peer Mentor name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## What types of support do you want from your Peer Mentor?

(check-ins before or after work, help communicating with supervisors, emotional support, coping skills, work goals, other)

## How often do you want to see or talk with your Peer Mentor?

Do you have any other concerns or things you want us to know about to help support you with your internship?

## Are you able and willing to work 10 hours/week?

If not, how many do you prefer and what obstacles make it difficult for you to work 10 hours?

## Check off any accommodations that you feel may be useful to you:

- ☐ Shorter/more frequent breaks
- ☐ Beverages and/or food permitted workstations (to mitigate side effects of medication, etc.)
- ☐ Development of strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- ☐ Modification or removal of non-essential job duties (only doing essential job duties)
- ☐ Creation/implementation of daily “to-do” lists, (step-by-step checklists, written instructions)
- ☐ Additional forms of communication to match employee’s preferred learning style (written, verbal, e-mail, demonstration)

## List any other accommodations or supports that you feel may be useful to you:

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# CORE Internship/Job Management Plan

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Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Community Support Team/Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

Peer Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

You've gotten the internship! Congrats! Let's take a second to think about that, what are your goals for the internship? What skills would you like to gain?

*Some people find that they may need different types of support to stay working. For some people, it may be occasional check-ins, and for others, it may be support on the worksite.*

What kind of supports do you want to have from your Peer Mentor/CORE Coordinator?

1.

2.

3.

# CORE Internship/Job Management Plan

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What are 3 things that you may need help with on the job? Keep in mind that many of us underestimate our abilities and performance, so try to think of areas of growth that are clear and specific. For example, completing all tasks on a to-do list or arriving for shifts on time.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are some early warning signs that you may need more help on the job? For example, problems with sleep, becoming more easily frustrated, or missing appointments. Identify 3 signs that you may be needing more support.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Have you chosen to disclose to your employer, if so how often would you like your Employment Specialist to check in with your employer?

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Is there anything else you'd like to include in your Internship Management Plan?

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Participant Signature

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Date

---

CORE Staff

---

Date

# CORE Application

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***This is an example of what our application looks like***

CORE is a career readiness program that has two phases to support you in being successful in the working world. Phase 1 is workshops in a classroom and in the community over about 3-weeks. Phase 2 is an 8-12 week paid internship component, about 10-hours a week and a placement that you interview for and have an interest in.

This application is to learn a little about you, your interests, and your availability to see if you are a good fit for this upcoming cycle! This CORE Cycle is scheduled to begin in mid-July 2022! Applications will be accepted until Friday, July 8th! Filling out this application is also a great way to learn more about CORE and get connected to the Team!

If you have any questions or just want to learn more about CORE, please reach out via email or phone to the CORE Coordinator and/or Peer Mentors.

**What is your name and what pronouns do you use?**

**Please share your contact info:**

Email:

Phone:

If you don't have a phone what is the best way to consistently contact you?

What is your preferred method of communication? (call, text, email, etc.)

**What program are you in?**

**Who is a preferred staff (Therapist, case manager, other) that we can contact to collaborate on the best way(s) to support you through CORE? And what is their contact info? (Name, phone, email)**

**What days/times are you available to meet?**

**Do you have access to a computer and WiFi?**

**Are you currently working or in school?**

Please share more details about your work or school involvement:

# CORE Application

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(Continued)

**What are you hoping to learn during CORE?**

**What is the highest level of school you have completed?**

**Have you had a job before?**

Please share any details on work, internship, or job readiness experiences you have had in the past:

**What are some things you would love to do at an internship?**

**Any places would you love to intern at?**

**Is there anywhere you do NOT want to have an internship, or anything you do NOT want to do?**

**Are you willing to work 10 hours/week at your internship? If not, how many hours are you willing to work?**

**How far are you willing to travel for an internship? Are you comfortable with public transportation and/or do you need any support with traveling?**

**What is the number one priority for you regarding an internship? Ex. proximity to home/convenience, type of work, other?**

**Do you have a form of identification such as a State ID or Driver's License?**

**Did anyone help you with filling out this application?**

**Is there anything else you would like to share with the CORE team?**

# Vocational Peer Mentor Job Description

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Vocational Peer Mentors possess personal lived experience navigating work and school with mental health conditions as an adolescent and young adult. Vocational Peer Mentors validate, inspire and support clients to be successful with CORE. Vocational Peer Mentors: (1) serve as an integral part of the CORE Implementation Team; (2) co-facilitate CORE activities using the CORE manual; (3) support young person engagement in CORE workshops and internships; and (4) support CORE community and outreach efforts. Vocational Peer Mentors report to the Vocational Coordinator.

## Duties & Responsibilities

- Share experience in maintaining a job or attending school while navigating mental health struggles in order to validate CORE participant experiences and provide hope.
- Encourage and empower participants to stay engaged and thrive in the CORE Experiential Workshops & Internships through developing strong bonds and employing creativity.
- Co-facilitate CORE workshops with Vocational Coordinator and other Peer Mentors
- Collaborate with participant, clinical team, and employer to create an individual retention support plan for 12-week internship
- Support participants for preparing for and succeeding in their internships.
- Ability to navigate via public transportation to travel-train participants.
- Meet individually with CORE participants in the community to provide encouragement, reflect on what they are learning about themselves, and model employment and self-advocacy skills.
- Consult with Vocational Coordinator and IPS Team to best support CORE participants when a participant struggles with their internship.
- Demonstrate self-care on the job and support CORE participants in developing and enacting self-care plans for internship success.
- Participate in supervision, team meetings, agency required training, and external trainings as applicable to the position.
- Document activities in a timely manner per requirements of funding sources and internal program evaluation and quality improvement departments.
- Support CORE Team in maintaining strong relationships with internship sites & site supervisors.

## Education

- Possesses at least a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Preferred experience with post-secondary education training, either through previous or current enrollment at university, college, or training program.

## Experience

- Has entry level employment experience as an adolescent or young adult.
- Possesses lived experience in effectively coping with a serious mental health condition and a capacity to share their recovery story in a way that engages, inspires, and validates the experiences of Youth and Young Adult clients.

# CORE Coordinator Job Description

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The Vocational Coordinator coordinates the implementation of CORE, a time-limited intervention aimed to increase success with Individual Placement & Support (IPS) Supported Employment and competitive employment with young people. The Vocational Coordinator oversees CORE recruitment, coordinates and facilitates CORE workshops, develops and supports CORE internships, supervises part-time vocational peer mentors, and is responsible for partnering with the Employment & Education team to support CORE graduates in securing competitive employment.

## Duties & Responsibilities

- Recruit CORE participants through strategic marketing & partnerships.
- Screen CORE participants for eligibility & assess for career interests.
- Coordinate and facilitate CORE workshops, including preparing materials, leading activities, and following up with clinical teams to support participant engagement.
- Strategically develop internships in partnership with the IPS Team.
- Communicate regularly with Internship Site Supervisors to support participants & Supervisors.
- Supervise and support Vocational Peer Mentors in co-facilitating CORE workshops and providing individual support to CORE participants while completing their internships.
- Maintain CORE participant information in EXCEL database.
- Attend weekly YAYAS Employment & Education team meetings.
- Engage in weekly supervision with IPS Team Leader; provide accurate information about CORE, develop solutions for how to improve CORE coordination.
- Document activities in a timely manner per requirements of funding sources and internal program evaluation and quality improvement departments.
- Monitor and approve schedules and timesheets for Peer Mentors.
- Understand and implement core principles of IPS services.
- Provide direct services in the community or on sites at agency location.
- Ability to navigate the Chicagoland area via public transportation to travel-train participants.
- Assist IPS Team with delivering IPS services on occasions when support is needed.
- Other duties as assigned.

## Duties & Responsibilities

- Required to work flexible schedules and be available to work on weekends or evenings.
- May be required to provide transportation for members of the program using a Thresholds provided vehicle or personal vehicle.
- Participate in discussions and learning opportunities that enhance skill set.

## Education & Experience

- Possesses at least a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Has experience coordinating services, events & activities with older youth and young adults
- Has experience educating and coaching youth and young adults with mental health needs.
- Has experience as IPS Employment or Education Specialist

# CORE Memorandum of Understanding

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## Moratorium

Between

---

and

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This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets forth the terms and understanding between [AGENCY] and the partner company. We are asking you to partner with us for the second portion of the Career and Occupational Readiness (CORE) program, the paid internship. [AGENCY] will respond to any potential unemployment insurance and workers' compensation benefits; and unemployment and workers' compensation claims involving our youth. [AGENCY] will provide a salary of \$10.00 an hour for our youth to work ten hours a week for you for three months. They will be able to assist with everyday work tasks that support the needs of your business. [AGENCY] will continue to provide support to your business and our youth during the time they work for you. You will be able to interview these individuals to ensure they are a good fit for your company. We fully expect you to have the same expectations of these individuals as you would have of any other employee to be able to maintain their employment with you. We believe that these young adults will be able to assist you in continuing to make your business a success.

### **Background:**

CORE is a program that will assist our young adults in honing the soft skills that will allow them to be successful in obtaining and maintaining employment. It is a two-part program comprised of a three-week soft skills training program followed by a paid internship with partnering companies.

### **Purpose:**

It is the belief that the two phases will help improve soft skills of our youth. A lack of understanding of realistic expectations on the job may be the reason why many young adults are not able to maintain employment. Our hope is that CORE will provide the experience these young adults need to be successful in long-term employment.



# CORE Memorandum of Understanding

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**Duration:**

This MOU shall become effective upon signature by the authorized officials from the (list partners) and will remain in effect until modified or terminated by any one of the partners by mutual consent. In the absence of mutual agreement by the authorized officials from (list partners) this MOU shall end on (end date of partnership).

**Additional Terms:**

Each party hereby agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold the other party harmless from any and all claims, demands, costs, liabilities, losses, expenses and damages (including reasonable attorneys' fees, costs, and expert witnesses' fees) arising out of or in connection with any claim that, taking the claimant's allegations to be true, would result in a breach by the indemnifying party of any of its warranties and covenants set forth in this MOU. In no event will either party be liable for any damages or other relief (including, but not limited to lost data, profits, revenue or opportunities), any special, exemplary, incidental, consequential and/or punitive damages or other similar claims, even if either or both parties have been advised of the possibility of such damages.

**Contact Information:**

Agency Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone/Fax \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Agency Rep Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Partner name \_\_\_\_\_

Partner Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone/Fax \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Partner Rep Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# CORE Insurance Information

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## For Risk Management

CORE is vocational training program that is being implemented at [Agency]. CORE targets young adults diagnosed with serious mental health conditions who: 1) are enrolled in [Agency] Youth & Young Adult Services and 2) have struggled immensely with obtaining and maintaining employment. It is critical to intervene early and support successful connections to the labor market to avoid lifelong poverty and dependence on federal disability benefits among individual with serious mental health conditions.

CORE was previously piloted within a supported employment program in Chicago. CORE demonstrates its promise for this vulnerable population. Among former participants, standardized measures revealed increased self-esteem and self-efficacy; employers observed improved on-the-job confidence, and 18 young people completed internships – with 15 (83%) securing competitive-wage employment within a year of completing CORE.

CORE includes 3-weeks of interactive workshops that prepare CORE participants for success with a 12-week paid internship in industries/fields aligned with participant career interests. The internship simulates an entry level employment to learn and reinforce job skills, accountability and time management. [Agency] recruits and partners with employers to provide a meaningful internship experience. Employers who volunteer to host an intern review and sign the Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the employer's expectations, most importantly that if a young person begins to struggle in their internship that they inform [Agency] immediately. This includes expectations for the Internship Site Supervisor as well.

The [Agency] CORE team does not supervise the CORE intern, employer-partner Internship Site Supervisors supervise CORE interns and sign off on internship hours completed weekly. The CORE team, including CORE Coordinator and Vocational Peer Mentors, support CORE participants with internship success through providing intensive in-person and virtual support and coaching. The CORE Coordinator also checks-in with Internship Site Supervisor regularly, based on the Site Supervisor's preferences. CORE interns are free labor for employers. As an additional benefit for employers, [Agency] also offers employer partners training on mental health awareness, stress and self-care on-the-job, and diversity and cultural responsiveness.

CORE participants intern for 10-hours a week and are paid \$10/hour (below minimum wage) by the [Agency] CORE interns are NOT employees of [Agency] and are not paid through [Agency] employee payroll. Rather, they receive bi-weekly "internship stipends" during their 12-week internship.

# CORE Frequently Asked Questions

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## Who is a good candidate for CORE?

CORE is a Career Training program offered to Chicago based YAYAS members at this time

CORE is for self-motivated young people who need a little extra support before (re)entering the workforce

CORE is not appropriate for young people who are actively working a competitive job or who have already completed a CORE internship

## CORE Phases

### Phase 1: Core Workshops

Location:

Date & Time:

### Phase 2: Internship

Schedule is developed with site supervisor

Approx. 10 hours per week for 12 weeks.

### Phase 3: Reintegrate

Referred to IPS & Supported Education Team and/or support is continued for employment/education goals

## CORE Payment

CORE participants fill out a W9 form and are paid via check written out to them directly utilizing their legal name

### Workshops:

Young people earn up to \$75 for participating in all 7 workshops

### Internships

Young people earn \$10 an hour for their internship, resulting in up to \$1200 across 12-week internships

# Works Cited

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**CORE**

**Career Opportunity  
Readiness  
Experience**

**OPERATIONS MANUAL**

**2022**