

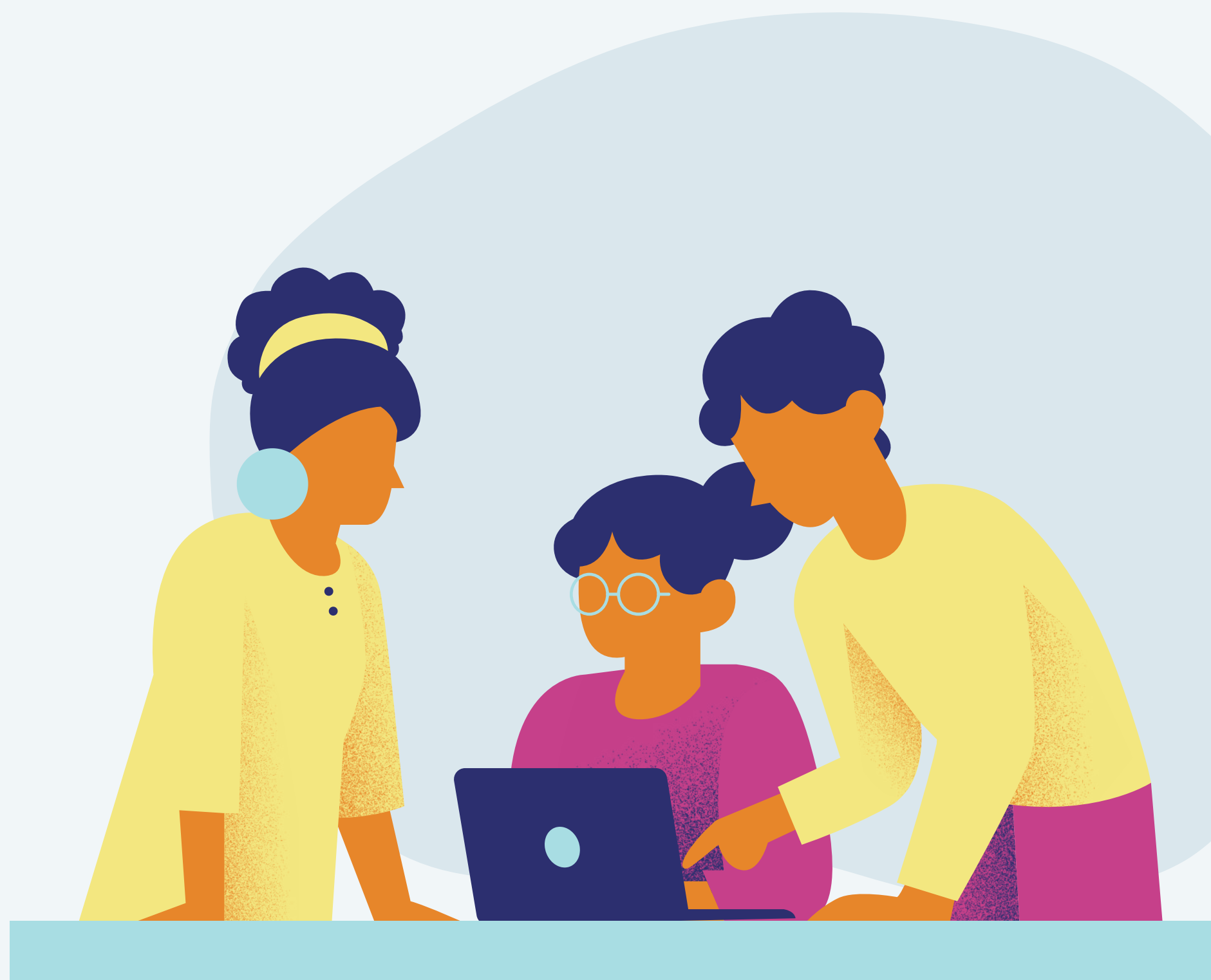
SHARPEN PEER RESILIENCY (SPR) FOR TEENS

An evidence-based, trauma-informed program that decreases stigma, builds strength and resilience.



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WHY MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY?

In response to the mental health challenges facing young people, the U.S. Department of Education released an extensive resource outlining serious challenges facing school mental health support systems and corresponding recommendations (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), including: (i) Prioritizing wellness for each and every child, student, educator, and provider (ii) enhancing mental health literacy and reducing stigma and other barriers to access (iii) implementing a continuum of evidence-based prevention practices (iv) establishing an integrated framework of educational, social, emotional, and behavioral health support for all.

Peer mentors complete training in the SMHL program, then lead the Sharpen Peer Resiliency curricula with the mentees.



Sharpen meets all four of the mental and emotional wellness priorities outlined by the Department of Education and can be deployed through schools or via community service organizations. Through the unique peer resiliency model, we are able to engage adolescents deeply into conversations about mental health (Hussa-Farrell, 2015; Beretta et al, 2023; Biber, 2023; Biber & Rothman, 2023).

Mentors complete the 5 hour program outlined below and learn from more than 75 peer-to-peer videos and psychoeducational modules:

- 1 Humanistic mental health literacy
- 2 Stigma reduction
- 3 Suicide prevention
- 4 Disordered eating prevention
- 5 Strategies for building resilience and social-emotional skills

Based on nearly 20 years of leading mental health literacy training in schools, the content assembled into SMHL has been created utilizing the practices outlined by recent research (Semchuck et al, 2023) requiring assessment, deep community listening and robust engagement from stakeholders (Gruber et al, 2023).



Benefits Whole Child

When high school students are matched with middle school / elementary school students, these relationships have immense benefits to both mentors and mentees, by building leadership characteristics, self-confidence, self-worth and social skills (Williams et al, 2024; Haft et al, 2019; Clarke-Midura et al, 2018).

The research demonstrates significant academic as well as increased emotional well-being, higher self-esteem, and better communication skills for middle school mentees (Gehreke et al, 2024).

Several studies have found that mentored youth are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college compared to their non-mentored peers (Jenner et al, 2022).

Participation in peer mentoring programs allows students to intentionally address or enhance their individual areas of development through engagement in various activities, resulting in benefits for all students involved (Williams et al, 2024; Haft et al, 2019; Clarke-Midura et al, 2018).

WHY PEER RESILIENCY?

Resiliency Technologies has worked for 20+ years to develop and integrate best-in-class youth mental health resiliency programming.

Our collaborative approach incorporates best practices in improving child and adolescent resilience, mental health literacy (MHL) and utilizing hundreds of peer-to-peer videos.

These videos are integrated into evidence-based psychoeducational modules that help young people understand:

- Humanistic Stories of Strength, Grit and Resilience
- Stigma and Mental Health Literacy
- Stress Reduction and Emotional Wellness Tips & Tricks
- How to Help a Friend Who Might Be Struggling
- How to Improve Body Image and Social Media Literacy
- Nutrition Science and Optimizing Energy

Our History

Resiliency Technologies, Inc. developed the Sharpen technology platform in 2014 after nearly 20 years leading live mental health education programs in K12 schools. The Sharpen Mental Health Literacy (SMHL) course, which is offered through the Sharpen platform, connects programming for students, educators, staff, and caregivers alike. After young adults or high school students complete the SMHL program, they have the opportunity to help younger peers build resiliency.

All Sharpen programs are designed intentionally to humanize mental health through peer stories of resilience and strength. Regardless of which audience is utilizing the Sharpen platform, we combine reading, video, reflections, and activities with multisensory integration, so everyone can learn and grow. Students can access brief resiliency modules, then discuss the themes with their trained mentor.

By making the mental wellness toolkit user-friendly, applicable to young people through peer stories of resilience and strength, we provide a common, non-judgemental language for kids to engage in productive conversations about mental wellbeing.

ABOUT US

Our Unique Approach

The Sharpen Peer Resiliency (SPR) program offers teens peer focused training that improves multiple protective factors that include:

- Understanding the risk factors and protective factors for mental health from youth stories of strength and resilience.
- Decreasing weight stigma and bias relating to body, shape and weight.
- Improving social media literacy through critical thinking activities.
- Identifying specific steps to assist a friend in getting help, including suicide prevention resources.

Focused Skill Building - Helps individuals develop transferable, applicable, and diverse life skills. From navigating peer-to-peer and adult relationship to community engagement and professional development, we focus on helping our teens grow into well-rounded young adults.

Access to Support - All Sharpen modules connect teens to local and regional resources for support, including crisis response.



Implementation Expertise

The Sharpen Peer Resiliency program has been implemented successfully and with fidelity in multiple settings. The largest contributor to that success is understanding the interests of the mentors prior to implementation.



IMPLEMENTATION

Examples:

- College aged students were trained in SMHL and led SPR for youth participating in the Girls Empowering Movement program led by HealthMPowers in Georgia (Davis et al, 2025).
- Youth participating in city-wide suicide prevention training experience Sharpen Peer Resiliency program as a self-discovered app to build protection against suicide and other risk factors (Rios et al, 2025).
- High School aged peer mentors were trained on the high school version of SMHL. Afterwards, they provided the SPR curricula to middle school and elementary school children as part of their ASTRA club service requirement. This program, led by Robyn Husa Farrell, was implemented successfully for 5 years at Spartanburg Day School and received recognition at ASTRA national conference (Husa-Farrell, 2015).
- Educators (non-clinicians) were trained in the Sharpen Peer Resiliency and Sharpen 5 Minute Mindfulness programs, then given the mindfulness curricula for elementary aged youth. The children participated in after-school resiliency training and found improvements in both academic and behavioral (Bauer et al, 2017).

Sharpen Peer Resiliency is a 4 week program that is intended to be deployed in collaboration with a trained near-peer mentor.

Week One:

Understanding Mental Wellness

- Overview of mental wellness
- Decreasing stigma
- Understanding core mental health challenges
- Downloadable activity cards with "5 Minute Mindfulness" evidence-based mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) activities.

Week Two:

Understanding Mindfulness

- Understanding mindfulness through a series of 7 training videos and interactive activities that outline mindfulness, sample activities and strategies for enhancing a mindful living.
- Learning about stress and strategies for managing stress using an array of techniques.
- Downloadable activity cards with mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) activities

SHARPEN PEER RESILIENCY



Week Three:

Improving Body Image / Social Media Literacy

- Disordered eating prevention, evidence based dietetics and improving body esteem through a series of 7 videos, interactive activities.
- Social media literacy awareness and critical thinking skills building through exploring multi- media samples.
- Downloadable activity cards with mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) activities

Week Four:

Healthy Coping

- Social emotional skills building through 7 videos and interactive activities that include: goal setting, self-care, improving coping skills and sleep hygiene.
- Suicide prevention through sources of strength activities and youth stories of resilience.
- 7 downloadable activity cards with mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) activities

Each module within the SPR course contains:

1. Peer videos highlighting stories of resilience and strength to humanize mental health and provide context (Hinshaw, 2023)
2. Connection to recent research and fact sheets
3. Resources for support and immediate help
4. Downloadable activity sheets and exercises

Defining anxiety



Video

Courtney is a licensed mental health professional who shares some insight about kids and anxiety.

According to the NIMH, researchers have found that several parts of the brain, as well as biological processes, play a key role in fear and anxiety. Researchers are also looking for ways in which stress and environmental factors play a role.

Download this quick mindsharpener!



Additional Documents

Additional Reading About Anxiety



CBT Toolkit Builder (14 and up)



Sharpen Conversation Starters



[Get Help Now](#)

“If we can understand and empathize with mental illness and humanize it, that’s getting close to the magic bullet for reducing stigma.”

Stephen Hinshaw, PhD
Sharpen Scientific Advisor

The Sharpen system enables inter-disciplinary research collaborations. For a full list of our current studies, please visit www.SharpenMinds.com/research.

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Biber, D. (2023). The impact of an mhealth mental health literacy training for foster parents prepared for trends in psychology. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00348-x>

Fadel, N., Stoner, A., Berreta, K., et al. (2024) A Process Evaluation of a Mobile App for Medical Students Aimed at Increasing Resilience and Decreasing Stigma in Mental Health. *Cureus* 16(6): e63054. [doi:10.7759/cureus.63054](https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.63054)

Biber, D., & Rothman, R. (2023). Mental health literacy training for college female peer mentors: A pilot study. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 14(1), 181–191. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-06-2023-0148>

Clarke-Midura, J., Poole, F., Pantic, K., Hamilton, M., Sun, C., Allan, V. (2018). How Near Peer Mentoring Affects Middle School Mentees. *SIGCSE '18: Proceedings of the 49th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education*. Pages 664 – 669. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3159450.3159525>

Davis, A., Gross, S., McEntyre, K., Biber, D., Meyer, A. (2025). Using an Out-of-School Time Initiative to Increase Access and Enjoyment of Physical Activity Opportunities for Adolescent Girls: A RE-AIM Evaluation. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 33, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2025-0030>

Gehreke, L., Schilling, H., Kauffeld, S. (2024). Effectiveness of peer mentoring in the study entry phase: A systematic review. *Review of Education*, 12(1), e3462. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3462>

Haft, S., Chen, T., LeBlanc, C., Tencza, F., Hoeft, F. (2019). Impact of mentoring on socio-emotional and mental health outcomes of youth with learning disabilities and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Child & Adolescent Mental Health* 24(4), 318-328. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12331>

Hussa-Farrell, 2015. Between 2006-2017, Robyn Hussa Farrell served as Executive Director of the nonprofit agency Mental Fitness. During her tenure, Hussa produced over 25 live and online programs, including the award-winning Flourish peer resiliency program and NORMAL THE MUSICAL which toured to over 200 schools. After each presentation she incorporated program response forms and live Q&A discussions with youth and clinical psychologists. Over 20,000 people participated in the Flourish peer resiliency and NORMAL musical programs. Additionally, Hussa developed a peer resiliency program (“Flourish” and 5 Minute Mindfulness) that ran for 5 years in middle and high schools and became the mindfulness curricula for Resilient Schools programs in South Carolina (with over 5,000 educators trained on the model). Finally, she created live events, interactive mental health fairs, teen mash up campaigns, videos, and documentary films featuring youth stories of resilience and strength. She deployed much of this content in the early days on a YouTube channel with over 1 million views over a four year period. The average age of the participants in all of these programs was 15 and ranged from 5 to 25. This is the foundational research that led to the creation of Sharpen.

Jenner, E., Lass, K., Walsh, S., Demby, H., Leger, R., & Falk, G. (2022). Effects of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program within a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 16(3), 473–500.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2022.2130119>

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Williams, C., Chen, J., Quirion, A., Hoeft, F. (2024). Peer mentoring for students with learning disabilities: the importance of shared experience on students' social and emotional development. *Front. Educ.*, 9 (2024).

<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1292717>

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The Sharpen Peer Resiliency and Sharpen Mental Health Literacy programs were developed over the course of many years. For more information about SMHL, please visit www.sharpenminds.com/smhl.

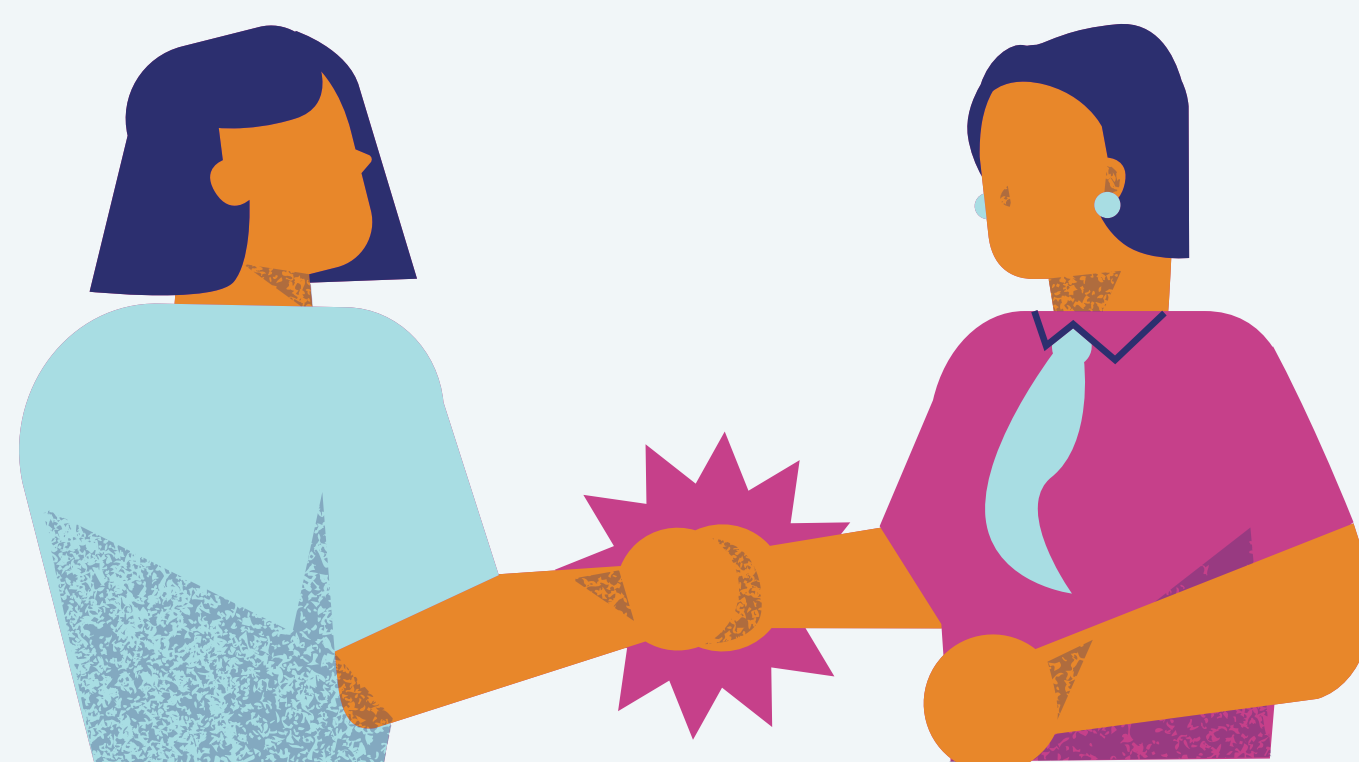
Our research stems from suicide prevention and eating disorder awareness & prevention programs that have been designed and led for youth, adults and for medical professionals over the course of 20 years.

The documentary films contained within the modules have been featured at multiple national medical and educational conferences; including the National Eating Disorders Association, International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals, as well as in over 500 academic institutions and treatment centers as training tools for licensed clinicians. Previous versions of this program have been utilized as a professional development training tool for over 5,000 educators and school professionals in 14 states and has shown to improve confidence and competence in managing eating disorders in the school setting by over 85% (Anderson et al, 2017). Specifically, the disordered eating prevention content within the SPR and SMHL programs was created in collaboration with an array of inter-disciplinary researchers:

- Duke Biber, Ph.D.
- Timothy Brewerton, M.D.
- Maggie Gainey, Ph.D.
- Natalie Fadel, Psy.D.
- Robyn Husa Farrell, MFA, E-RYT, YACEP
- Tim Farrell
- Alexis Stoner, Ph.D.

Sharpen participants in the film and modular content include:

- Chase Bannister, LISW
- Mary Bartlett, Ph.D.
- Timothy Brewerton, M.D.
- Cynthia Bulik, Ph.D.
- Deb Burgard, Ph.D.
- Lisa Carroll, M.D.
- Julisu Dimucci-Ward, Ph.D.
- Natalie Fadel, Psy.D.
- Stephen Hinshaw, Ph.D.
- Angela Mensah, Ph.D.
- Wendy Oliver-Pyatt, M.D.
- Rani
- Sam
- Sami



Much of the work that led to the creation of the Sharpen Peer Resiliency program was developed over the course of 20 years through a nonprofit organization called Mental Fitness, created by Robyn Husa Farrell. The programs were funded through multiple avenues that included families who lost their daughters to eating disorders, substance use disorders and suicide. Husa dedicates the Vescent Peer Resiliency collaboration to them, in loving memory:

Alex DeVinny

Erin Riederer

Andrea Smelzter

Dargan Bradshaw

Ashlee Gregory