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# Communication & Connection are Key!

A Public Health AmeriCorps Project on Increasing Public Health Preparedness and Psychological  
First Aid in the Rural Appalachian Region of Western North Carolina

By Jennifer Schroeder Tyson, Samantha McNeill, & Emily Baker

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# Meet the Team



Sam McNeill



Jennifer Schroeder Tyson



Emily Baker  
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# Trigger Warning

**Mental Health, Illness, & Suicide**

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# Presentation Overview

- AmeriCorps
- Psychological First Aid
- Communicating with the Communities We Serve
- Mental Health is Public Health
- Where to Take the PFA Training

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Has anyone previously served  
or currently serve with an  
AmeriCorps program?

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# AmeriCorps in a Snapshot

- Started in 1964 as Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA)
- Formerly known as Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)
- 1994 had 20,000 individuals across the country join as the first AmeriCorps class
- By 2016 there were over 1 million AmeriCorps members
- In 2022 AmeriCorps and CDC joined forces to create Public Health AmeriCorps

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# RAPID Psychological First Aid (PFA)

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# What is RAPID Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

- PFA is an initial disaster response intervention.
- An evidence-based curriculum.
- No prior mental health training needed.
- Designed to address surge capacity.
- Why is PFA needed?
- What does PFA do?
- The RAPID model has been found effective in promoting personal and community resilience.

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# Needs Assessment

## Public health crisis in NW NC

**> 50% claim that access to healthcare services is currently the most crucial social determinant in the area**

WNC Health Network, 2022

## Patient to Mental Health Provider Ratios

**1,780:1 - Alexander**

**1,300:1 - Caldwell**

**1,110:1 - Yadkin**

**930:1 - Mitchell**

*2022 North Carolina State Report*

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**Reflective Listening** active, intentional, human-mirror

**Assessment** eustress, distress, dysfunction

**Prioritization** triage

**Intervention** stabilize, mitigate

**Disposition** analyze, discharge,  
follow-up

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# Psychological First Aid Scenario

## Scenario A

There was a shooting at your school. You were on campus during the shooting and are now speaking to your teacher 4 days after the event.

## Scenario B

A wildfire has ravaged parts of your county. You are a volunteer wildland firefighter who responded to several distress calls. One call ended in multiple fatalities and you are feeling extreme loss. You meet with your fire chief to discuss your feelings a week after the event.

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# RAPID-PFA

## Elements

- Make a connection
- Attend to physiological needs
- Provide acknowledgment, recognition, and reassurance
- Remain calm
- Provide warmth, empathy, and genuineness
- Empower the survivor
- Obtain information
- Provide accurate information
- Help client access social support
- Make a referral for additional help if needed

## Things to Say

- "These things can be really confusing."
- "Sounds like this was devastating on many different levels."
- "I'm sorry. It really doesn't seem fair does it."
- "Thank you for sharing."

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## The Do's

- Be realistic in your assurance.
- Validate the client's feelings.
- Stay with client's focus.
- Learn to tolerate silence.



## The Don'ts

- Over-promise or over-reassure.
- Minimize the client's losses or make comparisons to other survivors.
- Change the subject.
- Fill up silence with chatter.
- Take client anger or frustration personally.

# Psychological First Aid Scenario

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# Communicating with the Communities We Serve

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## Medical Reserve Corps

KIRA PLUMMER & TEAM

Over the past couple of months, the MRC team has been drafting the MRC Program Plan. This plan is being submitted to the federal organization ASPR in order to receive funding for Watauga County (with satellite locations in Rutherford and McDowell counties). In front of a computer, brainstorming ideas, and meeting with community leaders and health care providers. Earlier in October, we met with Penny Yancy, MRC coordinator for Rutherford and McDowell counties, to establish another MRC in this region. Penny is a great asset for this program and we have this working partnership with her!

Alongside this critical work with developing the MRC, we have been submitted for the 2023 Preparedness Conference. This conference takes place annually in Atlanta, Georgia, and gives medical professionals a chance to work more collaboratively in the field of public health and safety.

It has been an excellent start for the MRC team. We are finalizing and submitting the MRC Program Plan. If you are interested in working on this project, please contact [kplummer@appstate.edu](mailto:kplummer@appstate.edu).



## Special Projects & Collaborations

CERT training, or Community Emergency Response Team training, is a program that trains volunteers about disaster preparedness and response hazards that may occur due to natural disasters in the communities they live in. A few of our team members, Lauren, and Sam, have spent time learning about CERT and coordinating with local AmeriCorps members. This is a promising, and we are excited about this opportunity!

### Suicide Prevention Crosswalk

Our team has partnered with the local health department and staff at Appalachian State University to develop Suicide Prevention Strategies with the local health department on campus. Within this review, we are successful and the possibilities could be taken to expand on our current strategies in the future.

A handful of our members also participated in a **Crisis Clean-up** after a natural disaster. This opportunity helped these young professionals gain experience in responding to a crisis.

One of our Implementation Team members was invited to participate in a project this past December. McHenry and Yancey counties gathered a group of medical providers to discuss possible solutions to improve the care of patients since the closing of their birthplace. We were able to translate the summit's findings into Spanish.

## Announcements, Events, & Updates

Online CERT Training has begun, and the in-person portion has been scheduled for January. Those joining us selected the date they could participate in the face-to-face part, but just to remind you, you only have to show up on one of the days, not both. The dates and location(s) for the in-person portion of the training are as follows:

- Saturday, January 28th, 2023, in Leon Levine Hall of Health Sciences, room 103, from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
- Monday, January 30th, 2023, in Leon Levine Hall of Health Sciences, room 210, from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

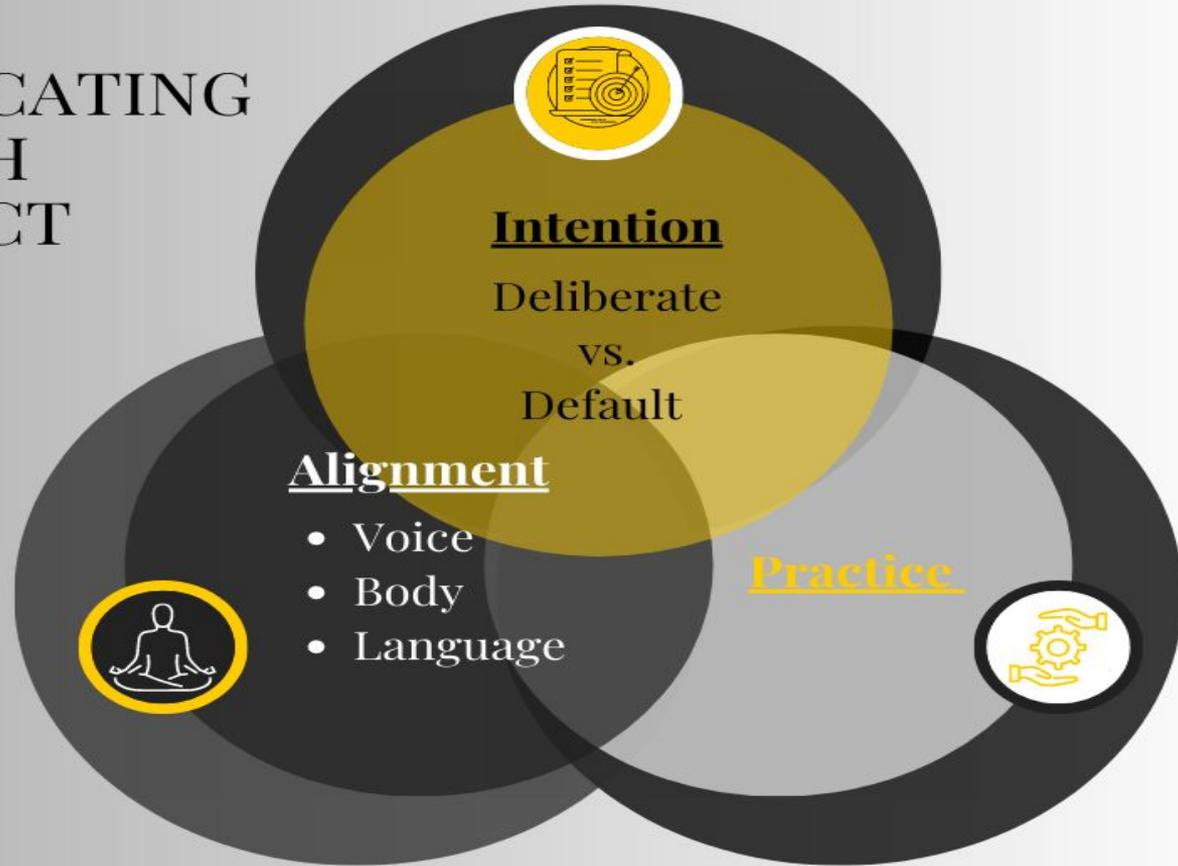
We want to thank everyone who will be joining us for this significant event. It is such a fantastic way to improve yourself and your community.

We are excited to announce a **Career Development Workshop** for our program members. Since our team comprises recent graduates and current students, we are all seeking career counseling as we plan to enter the workforce. Jennifer Perry, a Public Health Career Coach at Appalachian State's Career Center, has agreed to host a career development workshop so members can get field-specific help on resumes, cover letters, interview skills, etc. The workshop date has yet to be determined, but we will share it as soon as possible.

**We want to thank you for taking the time to learn more about our program. We look forwards to partnering with anyone who may be interested! If you have any questions please contact Jennifer Schroder Tyson at [tysonjs@appstate.edu](mailto:tysonjs@appstate.edu) or (828)-266-7151**



# COMMUNICATING WITH IMPACT



Adapted from notes taken at "Life After AmeriCorps" Event

# Mental Health is Public Health

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# Mental Health is Interconnected with Public Health

- “Mental and physical health have a **bi-directional** relationship, meaning that mental health affects physical health and physical health affects mental health. Because of this **reciprocal relationship**, it is extremely important that both aspects of health are properly **addressed** and considered when conducting **assessments** and providing treatment to individuals.” - The Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities National Training Center
- The CDC’s One Health Approach
- After a disaster, the demand for mental health services increases for 15-25% of the population.

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**One Health** involves everyone.

**COLLABORATING**  
Veterinarians  
Agricultural workers  
Pet owners  
**COMMUNICATING**  
Healthcare workers  
**&**  
**COORDINATING**  
Epidemiologists  
Policymakers  
Ecologists  
Scientists  
Laboratory workers

**Working together** is key  
to One Health.

[www.cdc.gov/onehealth](http://www.cdc.gov/onehealth)





# Where to Take the PFA Training

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@appstate\_publichealth



phac@appstate.edu



phes.appstate.edu/americorps

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# Q & A

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# Contact Us

**Jennifer Schroeder Tyson**, Program Director

(828)-262-7151

Tysonjs@appstate.edu

**Samantha McNeill**, Communications Team Lead

(828)-266-8737

Mcneillsp@appstate.edu

**Emily Baker**, Creative Content Coordinator

(704)-747-6063

Bakereg@appstate.edu

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