FYCS Rural Youth Fellowship for undergraduate students

Rationale: Recent evidence shows that the behavioral health workforce in rural communities is shrinking nationwide, including youth development professionals who provide programs and services to youth, their families and communities. In the state of Florida, 30 of the 67 counties in the state are designated rural, with 3.4% (~713,665) of the population living in rural areas. In addition, approximately 22% (1 in 5) of residents in rural counties are identified as a racial or ethnic minority, and compared to poverty levels statewide, many rural communities experience greater hardship. Rural youth tend to be particularly impacted by disparities in resources and opportunities, especially when the social determinants of health intersect (income, geographic region, minority status, citizenship status, etc.).

Aims: The FYCS Rural Youth Fellowship aims to support the development of students as youth development professionals in rural communities. The rural population in Florida is both geographically dispersed and ethnically diverse. As a result, rural communities are faced with increasing challenges including

- economic instability,
- lack of access to adequate health and mental health care
- lack of funding for important community institutions like public schools
- social and racial segregation

At the same time, rural communities offer many strengths including

- rich natural resources
- low population density
- strong family and social support systems
- resilient families and institutions

The purpose of the fellowship is to provide a course of study that prepares students to work with youth in rural communities, drawing on the community’s strengths and removing barriers to positive youth development.