

Voices Unmuted Fellowship

Call for Applications

A project of Scouts Healing Invisible Wounds (SHIW), supported by the AU-EU Youth Action Lab.

Seats: 23 fellows

Duration: 7 weeks — 6 weeks virtual + a 3-day residential training

Residential: November 2026 (exact dates to be confirmed)

Cost: Fully funded — no cost to participants

Apply by: Friday, 11 September 2026

The Gap We're Addressing

Kenya has made significant progress in building the policy frameworks needed to respond to its mental health burden — from the Mental Health Act 2022 and the Mental Health Action Plan 2021–2025, to the Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021–2026 and county-level plans such as the Nairobi County Mental Health Action Plan 2025–2030. Yet these frameworks are too often designed and overseen without the voices of the people they are meant to serve: young people living with mental illness and psychosocial disability. At the same time, those with lived experience frequently lack the specific skills and confidence needed to engage meaningfully with policymakers, institutions, and technical stakeholder spaces.

The result is that mental health policy and advocacy in Kenya has not come out as strongly as it could — despite its real potential to drive sustainable change in the systems meant to serve those who need it most.

The Voices Unmuted Fellowship exists to close that gap. It equips young people with lived experience of psychosocial disability — and those who stand alongside them — not only with tools and knowledge, but with real spaces to practice using their voice and pathways into the rooms where decisions are made. This is about change that goes beyond awareness.

About the Fellowship

This fellowship sits within the broader Voices Unmuted: Youth-Led Advocacy for Inclusion project, a 12-month initiative running from August 2026 to July 2027, supported by the AU-EU Youth Action Lab. The project is grounded in the African Union's Agenda 2063 — particularly its commitment to people-driven development and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision-making — and the African Youth Charter's vision of youth rights to participation, health, and dignity. At its core, Voices Unmuted is about ensuring that young people with lived experience of psychosocial disability are not just heard, but positioned as genuine partners in shaping the mental health systems meant to serve them.

We are calling for 23 participants to join the Voices Unmuted Fellowship: a 7-week program combining 6 weeks of virtual learning with a 3-day residential training, culminating in a graduation ceremony. Fellows will train alongside members of the project's Lived Experience Council, joining a growing community of young advocates working on mental health inclusion in Kenya.

Over the course of the fellowship, participants will cover:

- **Mental health literacy** and a rights-based understanding of mental health care, grounded in the WHO QualityRights framework
- **Understanding psychosocial disability** — the social model of disability, language, stigma, and inclusion
- **Kenya's mental health and disability policy landscape** and how to engage it, from the Mental Health Act to county and national mental health plans
- **Advocacy skills** — from the fundamentals of advocacy to engaging institutions, working groups, workplaces, and education institutions, and sustaining those relationships over time
- **Communication skills** — safely sharing lived experience, speaking to power, and written and digital communication for advocacy
- **Self-care and personal boundaries** — sustaining yourself while doing this work, including recognizing burnout and building self-compassion

Sessions are delivered through a mix of presentations, storytelling sessions, panel discussions, peer-led sessions, self-paced learning, and friendship circles — informal spaces for fellows to connect.

Who Should Apply

This fellowship is for young people who want to turn lived experience and passion into influence. We welcome applications from:

- Mental health advocates already active in the space who want to build stronger policy and advocacy skills
- Students of psychology or related fields looking to add practical policy and advocacy skills to their academic training
- Young practicing psychologists
- Persons with lived experience of psychosocial disability — whether personally, or as a caregiver who has supported a family member or close friend through mental ill-health
- Young people active in youth networks, community-based organizations, or peer support groups working on health, disability rights, or governance

- Early-career professionals in social work, public health, law, or community development interested in disability-inclusive policy

You do not need a background in mental health to apply — genuine interest and commitment matter most, though relevant experience is an added advantage.

Requirements

- Below 35 years of age
- Able to commit approximately 3 hours per week to virtual sessions over 6 weeks
- Able to attend the full 3-day residential training in November 2026
- A reliable, strong internet connection for virtual sessions
- No mental health background required — genuine interest is an added advantage
- Membership in a youth network is an added advantage

Full commitment to both the virtual sessions and the residential training is required — graduation is only awarded to fellows who complete the full program.

What You'll Gain

- A fully funded fellowship — no cost to participate
- Practical skills in mental health advocacy, policy engagement, safe storytelling and communication, and self-care while doing this work
- Direct opportunities to engage in policy and advocacy spaces, including county and national mental health working groups, and institutional and workplace engagements
- Access to psychosocial support as you carry out advocacy work and share your story
- Networking opportunities through SHIW's wider network of partners, institutions, and advocates
- A peer community of fellow advocates for ongoing support beyond the fellowship
- A toolkit and resource access to help you start or strengthen your own advocacy efforts
- The chance to learn directly from seasoned professionals working in mental health, disability rights, and policy
- Public recognition of your advocacy work through SHIW's digital platforms and campaigns, plus a certificate of completion recognizing you as a Voices Unmuted Fellow

Beyond Graduation

Your involvement with Voices Unmuted doesn't end at graduation. As a fellow, your insights will directly inform SHIW's future strategies and programs — you are not just a participant in this work, but a co-author of what comes next. You'll have ongoing opportunities to collaborate with us on policy and advocacy processes, both for the remainder of this project and beyond it, including representing the fellowship in institutional and policy spaces, mentoring or co-facilitating future cohorts, and staying connected to a growing peer network of young advocates working on mental health inclusion across Kenya.

How to Apply

Complete the application form at

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpOLSc35tOhdqd_uCVfqPrd5PJdwMm9UF2lvPc9PWCvdyLY4orPzw/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=101065402957182957945

by Friday, 11 September 2026. Shortlisted applicants will be contacted directly.

If you are not shortlisted this time but remain interested in participating, please reach out to us — we may be able to explore separate arrangements.

For questions, contact us at info@shiw.org or via WhatsApp at +254 797 714 680.

Voices Unmuted exists because we believe the people closest to a problem are also closest to its solution — and for too long, people with lived experience of psychosocial disability have been asked to be case studies rather than architects of change. If any part of this speaks to you, we would love to have you with us. Come as you are, bring your story, and help us build something that reflects the lives it's meant to serve.

SHIW strongly encourages applications from young women, persons with intersecting disabilities, and those from marginalised or underrepresented counties and communities. Personal information and any lived-experience details shared as part of your application will be treated with confidentiality.