NC ACT Coalition

ACT Internship Program

Hosting ACT Interns:

Insight from a Seasoned Supervisor

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What Works, What Doesn't, and Why It's Worth It

The tips and insights throughout this document draw from conversations with Stephen Betuker, a seasoned ACT team leader with over a decade of experience supervising interns and building teams across North Carolina. Stephen is a consultant and trainer with the UNC Institute for Best Practices.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT: The real-world case for hosting interns

It's your best hiring pipeline
Over 10 years and 30+ interns, Stephen would have hired all but two. His litmus test during a pre-internship interview: "Would I hire this person for a psych rehab or housing position right now?" If yes - they're intern material.

They stay longer when you hire them
Former interns who become staff already know the job, the team, and the clients. They don't leave after a year to get licensure hours - they're invested, and they stick around.

They bring their classmates with them
Even when interns move on, they refer friends. Stephen credited interns for filling positions with people he never would have found any other way.

License-eligible staff already trained
When you hire a former intern, ACT 101 is done; they know your EHR; they know your clients. When they start, HR only needs their paperwork. *Note: not all ACT teams pay for ACT 101 for their interns. Stephen sees this as a worthwhile investment.*

You stop hemorrhaging open positions
"I always had the chessboard in my head." Stephen rarely went more than a month without filling a therapist or co-occurring specialist position - because he was always thoughtfully positioning interns in the pipeline.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS: What experienced supervisors do differently

Interview them as you would hire them
Run a real interview - sometimes two. Ask yourself: would I hire this person for an entry-level position today? If yes, bring them on. If not, pass - even if they look great on paper.

Try to commit to a full school year
Aim for 9 months minimum - August through April. Three-month placements have less impact. By the time they're oriented and trained, the placement is over.

Use practicum as a pipeline
A counseling student who's with you one day per week during practicum is being built up. When they return for their full internship, they're already oriented and ready to contribute.

More than just one hour of supervision
Think of it like onboarding a new staff member - deliberate and ongoing. Other staff can help with shadowing and mentoring, but the team lead remains the school's primary contact.

Keep the decision with leadership
Don't run interns through a full team interview process. Tell your team: "You get a 9-month interview with this person - come back to me at the end." Keeps the process clean and fast.

Invest in their required trainings
Get them access to required training. Think of it as a pre-employment investment. If you hire them, the training is already done - saves time and money on the back end.

PITFALLS TO AVOID: Learn from experience before it becomes your experience again

Don't take every intern who applies
Being selective is everything. One wrong fit creates extra work and stress for the whole team. One great intern is worth far more than two mediocre ones.

Avoid programs that require constant staff accompaniment
Some programs require a staff member present for every client contact. That works for about two weeks - then it gets exhausting and unworkable. It's not realistic for ACT.

Get the academic calendar on Day 1 - and track it
School holidays will blindside you. Thanksgiving through New Year, fall break, spring break - none of which the real world gets. Stephen said this was his biggest recurring challenge. Get the calendar early and put every date on your schedule.

Address population comfort upfront
If an intern tells you they won't work with anyone who uses substances - and most of your clients do - you have a mismatch. Discuss expectations clearly during the interview, not after placement begins.

Don't be caught off guard by recording requirements
Some programs require recorded client sessions for coursework. Identify two or three willing clients early in the placement. Once you have a system for this, it's manageable - the same clients are often willing year after year.

PRACTICAL LOGISTICS: The nuts and bolts that trip people up

Only work with schools that provide liability coverage
If a school doesn't provide student liability insurance, don't work with them. There are plenty of programs that do. For agency coverage, treat interns like employees - mileage reimbursement, vehicle access, and agency insurance all follow the same process as staff.

Plan ACT 101 timing at the start
ACT 101 training dates may not align with the intern's scheduled days on-site. Plan around it early - it's a one-time logistics puzzle, not an ongoing problem. Once it's done, it's done.

School meetings are lower lift than you think
Most schools ask for a one-time supervisor orientation (often valid indefinitely) and two brief check-in meetings per year. End-of-semester evaluations take almost no time. It's very manageable once you're in the rhythm.

Interns are Coalition members too
Interns placed with Coalition teams can attend Coalition specialist meetings, in-person gatherings, and any learning events. This adds real professional development value to their experience - and connects them to the broader field early in their careers.
