



CALL FOR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH VOLUNTEERS ('CHAMPIONS')

Introduction:

Mental Health Uganda (MHU) is an indigenous Organization, established in 1997 by and for people with a lived experience of mental illness, care givers and service providers. Over the years, MHU has registered huge successes in the areas of advocacy for policy, rights and legislative reforms, advocacy for community mental health care, capacity building especially for membership district associations, livelihoods support for people with a lived experience of mental illness, rehabilitation and reintegration of homeless people off the streets of Kampala, user-led programming, anti-mental health stigma and discrimination, among others.

Stigma around mental health problems remains a major barrier to people accessing the needed timely care and support. Knowledge on mental health also remains low among the general public yet the investment in public mental health care remains almost stagnant at about 1% of the health sector budget in Uganda, according to the Mental Health and Control of Substance Abuse Division in the Ministry of Health. Deliberate efforts must therefore be made to localize the subject of mental health so as to induce a faster response for those who develop problems (before they escalate) and the resultant fall in the cost of care.

The Project and context of the role:

In view of the above, MHU, in partnership with Voice Global, started implementing the project "Normalizing Mental Health Conversations" in Jinja district, Eastern Uganda. The project is built around the concept of 'Social Contact', which is a conversation between a person with a lived experience of mental health problems (we call this person a 'Champion') and one without this lived experience.

Champions use Social Contact to normalize mental health conversations. What is key is that during these conversations, the Champion has to disclose on their lived experience (only to the level they are comfortable sharing). They are called 'Champions' because they are Champions of their story and have overcome stigma to be able to disclose their lived experience. By doing so, they normalize having a mental health problem thereby inspiring those silently battling mental health problems or at risk, to 'Speak Up' and those without problems to 'Be More Kind'.

For this project, 20 Champions will be selected from the users of psychiatric services at Jinja Regional Referral Hospital, the MHU District Association in Jinja, other organizations involved in mental health work and their affiliates. They will work alongside 2 VHTs and 2 Para-socials who will facilitate linkages with communities through Government of Uganda structures (and will, for purposes of this project, also be called Champions). To enable them perform their roles, the Champions will be trained to comprehend facts and myths on mental health, human rights around mental health, peer support, Psychological First Aid (PFA), detection/identification of cases, referral, among other things.



Functions of the Champions:

Working under the supervision of the Project Officer based in the project location, the Champions will:

- Conduct 'Social Contact' with members of the general public during small events organized by the project and within their communities
- Ensure that there is a good working relationship between the project team and participating stakeholders
- Liaise with the Project Officer to refer members of the public to places and institutions that offer professional mental health care (these will be mapped under the project)
- Participate in awareness work on mental health in the communities as may be required
- Collect data, basic information from their activities and report accordingly
- Participate in events and evaluations organized by the project
- Other activities related to the project as may be requested from time to time.

Profile of the Champion:

- Have a lived experience of a mental health problem but having achieved reasonable stability with their condition, and ready to disclose about their story
- Adult Ugandans between 18 – 35 years
- Trainable (able to read and write in English and or any other commonly used language in the project location); preferably having completed o-level education (Senior Four)
- Residing within Jinja area
- Have a friendly personality and able to build networks
- Willing to work only with volunteer incentives (spirit of voluntarism).

Application process:

Interested individuals should send an application letter indicating how they fit into this role/position above and a brief testimony (whole application, including the brief testimony should not exceed 2 pages), **not later than 4:00pm on Friday 30th June 2023** via email to mhu@mentalhealthuganda.org - subject line is "Application to become a Champion". **Do not send academic documents** – heavy files containing academic documents or submitted as images and or late applications will not be considered. **Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.** The Letter must also include the contacts of 1 suitable referee who can comment on the candidate's ability. Women are highly encouraged to apply.

Applications can also be hand delivered to the Mental Health Unit at Jinja Regional Referral Hospital.

Note: *MHU promotes zero tolerance for discrimination/harassment based on gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, religious beliefs, etc. All staff and volunteers shall adhere to strict guidelines in order to facilitate "silent" inclusion. Staff and volunteers also adhere to safeguarding provisions – a set of procedures and practices designed to ensure that no harm comes to project beneficiaries as a result of contact with MHU's programs, operations or individuals.*