



PROJECT 500. WHAT IS IT?

By Monsignor David Cappel, CEO, YouBelong Uganda

PROJECT 500, is a program developed in COVID-19, emergency conditions, to resettle 500 patients from Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital, back to family care, while supporting the returned person, and their family, to minimize relapses and readmissions to the hospital.

PROJECT 500 was made necessary, due to the high danger of COVID-19 infections in the overcrowded Butabika Hospital (often over 900 patients in a 550 beds capacity), to patients, health care personnel, and ancillary staff.

Butabika Hospital, is classified as an essential health service, by the Ministry of Health, and must remain open and functioning, particularly during emergency times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

YouBelong Uganda, is a registered NGO in Uganda, working to build a community-based system of mental health care, balanced with short term acute inpatient care, for people with severe mental illness.

YBU has a Memorandum of Understanding with Butabika Hospital, and close working relationships. YBU saw that it had a major role to play, in COVID-19 times, in supporting the hospital, and increasing its care for people with severe mental illness.



*YouBelong worker welcoming a person in recovery after arriving home as the latter's daughter looks on.
(YBU team member on the left)*



A YBU team member makes a phone call to a family during the Project 500 emergency intervention

In mid 2020, YBU introduced PROJECT 500, by modifying its pre discharge assessment processes, and post discharge empowerment plan, to a 5 weeks support program for a returned patient, and their family. This 5 weeks support program recently went through a mid term evaluation process, and is shown to be effective in reducing relapses, and those that do occur, can mainly be managed by the family, in the home environment.

However, by the second lockdown in mid June, 2021, it became clear to YBU, that the return rate of patients to families, needed to be increased significantly, as COVID-19 entered the hospital.



As of late June, 2021, YBU introduced:

- An emergency three weeks program, with a short assessment process at the hospital, and mixing face to face, and phone support, post discharge.
- The increase from one bus, to two YBU buses working five days a week, to return to home support, 50 patients per week.

The 3 weeks program will be closely monitored, with data collection and analysis, to check its effectiveness, and whether modifications are necessary as we progress PROJECT 500.

YBU has been involved in some training of health centres, in mental health, in previous years. It is clear that for effective community based mental health care, that scaled up education and training in mental health, needs to occur with VHTs and health centre personnel. In COVID-19 times, this must be a very high priority of Government.



YouBelong social worker encourages a discharged person to engage in household chores while at home during a post discharge visit (Discharged person washing utensils)

In the first lockdown, in 2020, YBU conducted a phone survey (at www.youbelongcommunity.org) of some service users and families, to ascertain the impact of COVID-19, particular the impact on mental health.

There will be a further evaluation of PROJECT 500 at the end of 2021.



YBU team members conducting a session at a family home as they return a discharged family member (YBU team members seated on a bench)



Community members help to push the YBU van which was stuck in a muddy road on its way to a family home post discharge visit in Wakiso district