



Annual Report

1st July 2022 to 30th June 2023

With deep gratitude to the team at YouBelong Uganda (YBU), our Board of Directors chaired by Dr Nathan Kenya-Mugisha, supporters and funders, including Wellcome, Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (MAK-RIF) supported by the Government of Uganda, Aga Khan Foundation supported by the European Union, and YouBelong UK, I provide this report. The work of YouBelong Uganda, is about developing innovations, and research evidence, to support people with severe mental illness; to create new early intervention and prevention strategies; and to strengthen the health system in Uganda, by embedding mental health care within it. Also, YBU works with girls and boys experiencing their early signs of mental illness. These innovative programs are informed by the lived experience of persons in recovery from severe mental illness.



The YouBelong Uganda team of Social Workers, Community Mental Health Nurses, Research Assistants, Support and Administrative Staff

1.0 YouBelong HOME

The flagship program of YouBelong Uganda is the priority of deinstitutionalisation; the resettling of ready to discharge patients from Butabika National Mental Referral Hospital, back to their families and local community. It is a highly successful program.



'Damalie' runs to her family members on return home by YBU.

YouBelong HOME is a package of innovations that have been research tested and proved effective. A combination of pre and post discharge assessment tools and empowerment tools, have resulted in over 500 people resettled back to their families, and over 1500 family members supported, since operations began in 2017. Over the last 12 months period, mindful of funding restrictions, a further 20 persons were

resettled back to their families, and 43 family members and community leaders were educated and empowered to provide recovery support, and 5 Health Centres workers engaged and encouraged to provide ongoing care.

The key outcome of the YouBelong HOME programme is the high success rate in managing relapses in the family home, and after a 12 months period, more than 80% of those returned home, have not needed to be readmitted to hospital care.

2.0 Strengthening Care in collaboration with People with lived Experience of psychosis in Uganda (SCAPE-U)

SCAPE-U is a WELLCOME funded, three-level research program, in its first year of operation, in which people with lived experience of psychosis (called FACILITATORS) participate in strengthening mental health services in primary-care, community, and home settings. The photovoice methodology is used, which equips people with lived experience of psychosis with the required skills to share the experience of their illness, treatment, and their recovery stories at 3 levels - primary care, community and home using recovery stories and photographs taken within their home environments to represent sections of their stories.

SCAPE U is in its contextualization phase in which several actions are being engaged:

- 21 health workers trained in WHO, mhGAP.
- 27 community workers/Village health team members (VHTs) trained to identify and make appropriate referrals of people manifesting signs and symptoms of mental illness.
- 21 primary health workers from 13 health facilities receiving support supervision.
- 27 Village Health Teams (VHTs) receiving support supervision.
- 9 SCAPE U facilitators trained in photovoice and participating in training health workers and VHTs, to deliver home-based intervention through sharing their recovery narratives with families of persons newly diagnosed with psychosis.
- 12 families of persons newly diagnosed with psychosis to receive at least one visit.
- The YBU team in partnership with Ministry of Health is designing the IEC material for community sensitization on psychosis.



A SCAPE U Facilitator and a YBU staff during VHT Supervision by the Primary Health Worker

3.0 PowerfulMinds Project

YouBelong Uganda (YBU) has formed a partnership with the Jinja Educational Trust (JET) to implement the PowerfulMinds project in four JET supported schools in Jinja and Buikwe districts. PowerfulMinds is a three-year project which aims to create mental health awareness among young people in schools, build the capacity of teachers to support learners' mental health and create linkages between schools and health facilities for continued care and support, and engage the carers/families of learners. This programme focuses on creating a well knitted support system that enhances mental well-being of learners and pays particular attention to learners and teachers in need of mental health care.

YBU team is undertaking the following activities;

- Design of child friendly Information education and communication (IEC) material in form of educative skits, posters and talking points that will be used to provide information to learners, teachers and carers to enhance mental health support in the JET supported schools.

- Development of safeguarding guidelines and procedures for four JET supported schools, and later train 56 teachers on safeguarding.
- Training of 25 teachers from 5 primary schools on mental health and basic counselling skills to build their capacity to support children with mental distress and refer those in need of mental health care.
- Orientation of health workers from 8 health facilities in the school community to enhance their ability to identify children with mental health problems and refer them for appropriate specialized care.
- Formation of 8 learners' clubs in 4 primary schools to provide learners with a platform to participate in activities that create mental health awareness and provide safe spaces for learners to discuss issues that affect their mental wellbeing. The clubs will also foster dialogue with learners to enable their participation in the design of programs that enhance their wellbeing.



The YBU Senior Social worker makes a presentation on School Mental health to Teachers of Jinja Education Trust

4.0 The IAMHOMA Project

IAMHOMA (Improving Adolescent Mental Health and Outcomes through a Multidisciplinary Approach) project is about adolescent mental health, its effects, and ways of preventing the development of mental illness. This program is to be conducted in secondary schools and is also about increasing access to psychosocial support services for secondary school adolescents with lived experience of mental illness.



IAHOMA Project Meeting with Children and their Carers

This project is being implemented by Wizarts Foundation in partnership with YouBelong Uganda and Makerere University College of Health Sciences. It is a one and half year's project to be implemented in 2023 and 2024 and is currently at the preparatory phase.

Adolescent peers will be trained in mental health messaging and drama skills, and supported by YouBelong Uganda and Wizarts Foundation, adolescent peers will create messages, poems and drama skits about mental health conditions, and the developed messages will then be shared with different stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, government leaders and other stakeholders) in Kampala and Wakiso districts.



A student presents to fellow students during a discussion about causes of mental illness in adolescents.

The YBU, Makerere University and Wizarts foundation team conducted a consultative meeting in March-2023, that focused on the experiences of the children with lived experience of mental illness to guide the development of communication strategies, mental health massages, to be used in creating awareness among the adolescents in schools.

The YBU team as the main facilitators supported by the Wizarts foundation team in May-2023, conducted a mental health training for students (peer ambassadors), teachers and auxiliary staff, to increase their awareness about mental health and mental illness. The trained students are to act as peer ambassadors in schools to increase mental health awareness amongst fellow students through drama groups being supported by trained teachers and auxiliary staff. The auxiliary staff include school nurses and counsellors.

5.0 Mental Health Literacy Program (MHLP)

MHLP is a Child and Adolescent mental health research project that aimed at assessing and supporting mental health outcomes among adolescents in Kenya and Uganda. It is an implementation research study where an educational intervention is to be delivered in secondary schools to students aged 13-19 years in Kenya and Uganda. The project is funded by the European Union and the principal investigator was Professor Amina Abubaker based at Agha Khan University in Kenya and the co-principal investigator Dr Ahmed Sarki based at Agha Khan University in Uganda.

In Uganda the program will be implemented by Aga Khan University in partnership with YouBelong Uganda, and other two civil society organizations.

YouBelong Uganda team will train 200 students and 7 teachers in mental health literacy. The mental health literacy curriculum comprises of 6 modules to be delivered in a period of 5 days.

The mental health literacy program is an important intervention that can be used in increasing mental health awareness in secondary schools. This will empower students and teachers to seek professional help earlier in cases of mental health stress or illness, since most mental disorders have their start in adolescence or early adulthood stages.

6.0 YouBelong Uganda engagement with Alternative Care Providers

YouBelong Uganda is developing plans to conduct a baseline survey by strategically interacting with different alternative caregivers to understand their perspectives on mental health and develop an in-depth collaborative approach to community mental health. The survey will focus on collecting information with a focus on the following objectives: -

- Explore in-depth and understand the cultural and spiritual interpretation of mental illness.
- Understand and explore the dynamics of alternative/cultural care response to mental illness and its impact on the treatment.
- Consult alternative care providers about the need, feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity for meaningful interaction between conventional care and cultural/alternative care, first as the subject of research for the evidence-based model of collaborative mental health care.

With findings from the survey, we plan on conducting training for alternative care providers on identification, management and most importantly referral of persons presenting with signs and symptoms of mental illness to health facilities within their local communities for immediate management of the presenting signs and symptoms.

7.0 Youth Consultation Group (YCG) meetings

YouBelong Uganda recognizes the importance of learning from the lived experience of people in recovery from mental health conditions and co-production of policy and programs, with young people in recovery.

The engagements with consultation groups are crucial to the co-production of YBU responses to the development of a balanced system of mental health care, between acute inpatient care and community-based care for people with severe mental health conditions, in Uganda. These groups inform the designing, development, implementation, and evaluation of YouBelong Uganda programs.



YCG Participants during one of their sessions discussing about felt stigma.

During this report's time frame, YouBelong Uganda conducted 8 YCG meetings; 3 for the children aged 12-16 years, 3 for the carers of the children under YCG, and 2 for the youth aged 18-25 years.

8.0 The YouBelong Uganda Women For Women (WFW GROUP) and HER partnership

In a highly patriarchal society, the presence of the YouBelong Uganda Women For Women Group is essential in ensuring that all YouBelong work gives special attention to supporting girls and women in addressing the social, cultural and economic barriers, to their active participation, as they would wish, in the life of their community.

The mental health and wellbeing of young women involves the social, cultural, and economic structures that support women to make and harness opportunities presented to them. WFW in partnership with "HER" Working Women, have used online and physical platforms of over 2000 women to advocate for social, cultural, and economic systems that support the mental wellbeing of young women and create awareness on issues that affect their mental wellbeing through short videos, mental health workshops and mental health education.



WFW Members Meet with Dr. Nataly Bitature of HER at the YBU Offices

In partnership with HER, YouBelong Uganda conducted a workshop on self-awareness as a tool for mental wellbeing during a HER monthly meetup which is attended by over 500 young women. The HER meetup is a monthly event where women in business come together and sell their products, market their businesses, learn more about business, personal growth, and have networking opportunities.

9.0 International Mental Health Day

The WFW group supported a 14-year-old girl recovering from a mental health condition (a YCG member) to compose a poem "We Need You" that she recited at the Uganda National Mental Health Day celebrations in October-2022. The poem was an appeal to all mental health stakeholders to pay attention to mental health needs of young people with special attention to the girl.



YBU Representatives pose for a photo at the National Mental Health Day Celebrations 2022

We need you

*I am a girl yet to be a woman
I hope to be an entrepreneur, may be a
expert or a researcher....
There is plenty of fish for me to catch out there.
I need you*

*Amid the waves of mental illness.
A disease attacking the young
and the adult.
We need you*

*Segregated by family, friends, and neighbours.
At school some care, others don't dare.
Some love, others hate.
Some children are forced out of school at an early
age....
" Who cares? They are balalu" So, they say.*

*In a system where supply of medication is limited.
In the search for cure, many go to shrines,
others use herbs and some go to the hospital.
We need you*

*When cared for, we feel happy, confident
and accepted, our DREAMS come to life!
Talk to us, Listen to us, there is always
something to share.
Involve us, we matter!
So let us rise up and support the children
with mental illness
We need you*



'Madina' a YCG Member chats with the Ministry of Health, Commissioner Mental Health after her Poem presentation at the Mental Health Day 2022

On behalf of the Uganda women and men who make up the YouBelong Uganda team,

**Chief Executive
YouBelong Uganda**