

Project Title: Ngatikurukurei hutano hwepfungwa(Let's talk about Mental Health)

Country of project implementation: Zimbabwe

Sponsoring college: Bryn Mawr College

Project Leader: Tinodiwanashe Nguruve, Class of 2022

Host Website: <http://yafm.co.zw>

My project was called Ngatikurukurei hutano hwepfungwa in Shona (native Zimbabwean language) which means Let's Talk About Mental Health. Since Zimbabwe is in the bottom tier of low-income countries, mental well-being is a luxury most Zimbabweans cannot afford. As a result, this made me pick the two objectives of my mental health project which were to involve the community in an empathetic dialogue towards mental health and to spread good information on how best to take care of one's mental health. Being involved in important mental health conversations can broaden one's worldview, leaving everyone better informed and this was all via radio driven conversations. Local community members can begin to break down the walls that surround the stigma around mental illnesses and encourage people to take care of their mental health. These support networks for mental health can not only aid in identifying and validating common fears, but also combat the negative stigma in talking about mental health. I only had one sole funding for my project, and it was Davis Projects for Peace.

I came up with this idea for my project when I took my first Introduction to Psychology class. The Introduction to Psychology class talked about biology, sensation, and perception, states of consciousness, psychology of development, personality theory, mental illnesses etc. The topic that really stuck to me was on mental illnesses and how they can go unrecognized. They can go unrecognized because the illness is not physical; and that can make it hard to diagnose or pinpoint. For example, when one gets a broken arm one can feel more empathy for them because one can clearly see the severity of the injuries.

One thing to note is mental health and mental illness aren't the equal thing. Mental illness refers to "conditions that affect a person's thinking, feeling, temper, or conduct." These can include but aren't restrained to depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. Mental health is one's emotional, psychological, and social well-being." It affects "how we experience, and act," mental health has a strong impact on the way we have interactions with others, relate to others and handle social issues. It is also very important to note that the absence of a mental illness does not mean the presence of mental health. That is why it is very important to be very intentional about taking care of one's mental wellness.

I then realized that this was exactly the issue that was labelled as taboo to talk about in my country. People were making fun of mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. These were labeled as western illnesses. If one was suffering from such, they would be called weak or be termed "Chibaba chedepression" which is a way of making fun of someone suffering from mental illness. Ever since I took it upon myself to learn about the importance of mental health. I went from creating app projects from my web development class in school that tackled mental health to attending talks on mental health. This was very important to me as I realized that these issues were not talked about in my country, so I then took it upon myself to raise awareness. The issue that my project is responding to has been existing since forever. I highly believe that since we are in a Covid-19 pandemic, it's more important that we talk about the importance of mental health now more than ever.

Research (Phase 1):

I spent time reading books on mental health since I was going to act as an educator over radio, so I spent time learning more about the importance of mental health. I read books like Understanding Mental Illness by Carlin Barnes, MD and Marketa Wills MD and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy by Seth J Gillihan. I also talked to psychologists based in Zimbabwe and got to learn about the difficulties they faced. I also spent time learning how to speak concisely and how to present well over radio.

Advertising (Phase 2):

This was the part where I created posters to share on all social media platforms. I was also talking to the radio show host and working on the action plans on how the radio program would plan out. The skeleton of our program was we would start with introductions of the guest speakers for that episode and me. We would go ahead and give a brief overview of the topic and the host would then interview us and give the listeners a chance to engage.

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Coordination (Phase 3):

We had our weekly sessions on Tuesdays from 6:30pm - 7:05pm CAT. The show was hosted on <http://yafm.co.zw>. YAFM is a Radio station within a 550km stretch of the Great Dyke in Zimbabwe. I was helped by Mr. Ngoni, a radio presenter. He is a highly resourceful, flexible, innovative, and enthusiastic Development Practitioner. Together we tackled the project by compiling all the mental health topics that were trending in Zimbabwe. The first topic in our show was on the definition of mental health and wellness. We also went talked about myths and facts surrounding mental health. For the rest of the sessions, I picked topics by gathering data from the local news, internet and from peers in Zimbabwe. During our shows we would have guest speakers like well-known mental health coaches and Zimbabwean celebrities who really helped make a lot of people come to the shows. During the shows we would invite listeners to call in. This helped the listeners to be very much involved as they could join in the conversation by a phone call.

The positive effects of gathering all the data on the latest mental health trends we got to talk about the most pressing issues which attracted a lot of local people. For example, Mr. Ngoni and I realized that a lot of youth were suffering from the aftereffects of this drug called "mutoriro" in Shona also known as crystal meth in English. Due to the economic hardships crystal meth can make people temporarily forget their problems but the negative effects are lack of sleep which then lead to mental issues. This is currently affecting youth as they are losing sleep and going mentally crazy at home. This conversation attracted a lot of good attention and we got to help and talk to concerned parents.

Roadblocks:

Due to Covid19 my radio talk show was online, and this meant that I had to join in using a phone from Bryn Mawr College in the United States. Sometimes there would be no network to call in and there was a time when my phone device stopped working and I had to pre-record it on my laptop. This meant that the conversations would be less engaging as it would sometimes be obvious that it was a pre-recording. Other than that, everything went well. There was never a time I thought that I could no longer complete my project because I had the support from the people I was working with, and everything was mapped out so it was very doable.

Peace:

After this internship I now realize that peace has nothing to do with money but a mental state where an individual can function well. For the longest time I kept thinking that maybe after I complete my education then I will have peace but peace is an active decision that one has to make each and every day. I also got a chance to reflect on the serenity prayer. Despite the hard economy in Zimbabwe, one has to find balance and peace in what one can't change. During the radio programming we would reflect on this prayer " God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." This is very important as in life there are some things that one has no control of like death of a loved one. Peace is also making sure that an individual is not making life harder for other individuals. This means to check how we dialogue with one another and see if we are conversing in a proper manner. In a manner that won't leave the words we say hurting another human being. Even a person's most private kindness and honoring of each other can create a positive public ripple. Peace is realizing that we all have problems, and we can never solve this world's problems so the best thing is to accept every single detail we can't change and face life head on. That to me is peace.

Quote reflective of my experience (Tinodiwanashe Nguruve):

The absence of a mental illness does not mean the presence of mental health. That is why it is very important to be very intentional and proactive about self-care and mental wellness.

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Mental Health Talk
Every Tuesday from 18:30 -19:00

Host:
Ngonidzashe Sesemani

Guest:
Tino Nguruve

91.8/101.9
www.yafm.co.zw

YA!
Pulse of The Great Dyke

The poster features a purple and pink gradient background with a city skyline. It includes portraits of the host, Ngonidzashe Sesemani, and the guest, Tino Nguruve. The text provides the show's title, schedule, frequency, frequency, and website.

