



Newsletter

Strengthening Mental Health and Inclusion Across Uganda

January-March | Quarter One

Break the Stigma!
Start the Conversation:
Call toll-free line
0800 21 21 21

IMPACT BY NUMBERS

768

- tele-counseling
sessions

520

- beneficiaries
(193F, 326M, 1
undisclosed)

30,000+

- reached in health
camp



Editorial Note

The first quarter of 2025 has been a powerful reminder of the resilience within our communities and the growing recognition of mental health as a public priority. From scaling up our tele-counseling services to expanding our reach through school-based interventions and national health campaigns, Mental Health Uganda continues to make significant strides in building a more inclusive and compassionate society.

This newsletter captures not just the numbers, but the stories—the voices of young people finding confidence again, individuals regaining hope through our toll-free helpline, and communities embracing mental wellness as a shared responsibility. Our partnerships—with Mental Helse Ungdom, the Kabaka Foundation, SOS Children's Villages Uganda, and others—have been instrumental in amplifying this impact.

We are especially proud of the momentum generated by our youth mental health and community empowerment projects, which speak to the heart of our mission: ensuring that no one is left behind in the journey toward mental wellbeing.

As we look ahead to the rest of the year, I invite you to walk this path with us—whether by sharing these stories, advocating for mental health rights, or simply being there for someone who needs support. Because together, **#ConversationsChangeLives**.

Derrick Kizza Mbuga, Executive Director, Mental Health Uganda

Our Programs



a) Amplifying the Voices of Young People with Mental Health Issues in Uganda

Mental Health Uganda, in partnership with Mental Helse Ungdom of Norway and funded under the ATLAS Alliance, is implementing the second phase (2025–2029) of this project. The focus is on supporting persons with mental health issues to claim their rights and achieve optimal wellbeing. The project employs tele-counseling, policy advocacy, peer-to-peer outreach, and strategic stakeholder engagement.



MHU staff giving Psychoeducation to students at the Tubere balamu health cam| Mityana

Key Achievements:

- Mental Health Uganda successfully acquired a new tele-counseling system. This system is fully owned by the organization, eliminating the need for monthly subscriptions. It enhances efficiency, guarantees data security, and incorporates a robust tool for comprehensive data collection.
- A total of 768 tele-counseling sessions were conducted during the quarter, reaching 520 individuals. These included 193 females, 326 males, and one undisclosed gender. The most frequently reported issues were depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- In partnership with the Kabaka Foundation, MHU provided community mental health awareness and psychological support to over 30,000 individuals during a health camp held in Mityana district. Services addressed conditions such as depression, anxiety, stress-related disorders, psychosis, dementia, and insomnia.
- The team also held a corporate mental health talk focused on emotional resilience and self-care. This session engaged 70 individuals who are clients of Prudential Insurance Company.

Challenges & Lessons Learned:

- During the system development and transition process, routine tele-counseling services faced temporary interruptions. This affected the timely documentation of client data and the ability to follow up consistently.
- Strategic collaborations, such as those with the Kabaka Foundation and Prudential, proved to be an effective way to access broader community groups and promote mental health services.

Way Forward:

- In the next quarter, MHU plans to commemorate Mental Health Awareness Month in May 2025 through a range of awareness-raising activities.
- The tele-counseling team will undergo a refresher training to enhance skills in delivering telephone-based support.
- Marketing and visibility campaigns for the toll-free line will be rolled out across multiple platforms including community events, social media, radio talk shows, and IEC materials.
- Peers in Kanungu district will be trained in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) and life skills. Additionally, MHU staff will receive training on safeguarding protocols.

*For a free professional
counseling.*

CALL TOLL FREE

0800 21 21 21

*Available , Monday- Friday
8:00 am- 5:00pm*

b) Youth Mental Health

Mental Health Uganda and SOS Children's Village Uganda are jointly implementing a three-year project (2023–2025) to promote mental health and psychosocial well-being among young people aged 13 to 19. Funded by ODW, the project is being piloted in 8 selected schools across Gulu and Wakiso districts. It seeks to normalize mental health challenges, reduce stigma and discrimination, and enhance access to psychosocial support within schools. This is being achieved through the active engagement of trained student mental health champions, mentor champions, and supportive focal teachers. By Q1 2025, the project had made remarkable progress through impactful school and community activities.



Key Achievements:

- The midterm evaluation report was shared with stakeholders who appreciated the project's milestones. This opened up discussions on sustainability and led to the identification of platforms such as school assemblies and parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings to continue spreading mental health awareness.
- Mental health clubs were fully established in all eight project schools, with each club comprising 30 active members. These clubs serve as a long-term strategy for sustaining student engagement and awareness.
- Mental health awareness campaigns were carried out in four schools, significantly boosting students' knowledge of mental health and their capacity to manage daily stressors. This contributed to their emotional wellness and academic focus.
- Students benefited from psychosocial support services, including Psychological First Aid (PFA),

- psychoeducation, and referrals. These services led to visible improvements in student behavior, social engagement, and mental well-being.
- Regular review meetings with champions ensured follow-up support, boosting the mental wellness of primary stakeholders and strengthening peer engagement within the schools.

Challenges & Lessons Learned:

- Due to tight school schedules, some planned mental health awareness campaigns were delayed.
- Review meetings with mentor champions did not take place in March, limiting insights into their community-level impact during the quarter.
- Installation of Talking Compounds in schools effectively sparked conversations about mental health, particularly among new students. These spaces

enhanced student interaction with mental health champions.

- At Gulu SS, the inclusion of mental health in weekly Foster Family discussions demonstrated ownership and sustainability of the project's goals within the school environment.
- The formation of school mental health clubs empowered student champions to lead peer dialogues, debates, and awareness sessions, increasing the impact of outreach activities.

Way Forward:

- Conduct mental health campaigns in six schools in Q2.
- Host radio talk shows in both Gulu and Wakiso to reach broader audiences.
- Commemorate the Day of the African Child (DAC) in both districts.
- Organize an essay competition to engage students creatively in mental health awareness.
- Hold monthly review meetings with student champions
- Continue delivering psychosocial support to identified students in need.
- Undertake quarterly monitoring and review sessions for better tracking and improvement.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Psychoeducation Outreach Summary

The Youth Mental Health Project has trained a dedicated network of Mental Health Champions, Focal Teachers, and Mentor Champions to lead peer-to-peer mental health interventions in schools and communities across Wakiso and Gulu districts.

Through this approach, the project continues to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA), deliver psychoeducation sessions, facilitate community engagement, and strengthen referral pathways. The figures below reflect the outreach and impact achieved this quarter as a result of their committed efforts.

1. School-Based Reach (Gulu vs. Wakiso)



Gulu Schools:

- 199 Male
 - 43 Female
- Total: 242 students**

Wakiso Schools:

- 121 Male
 - 162 Female
- Total: 283 students**



Students perform during school mental health campaign at St. Charles Lwanga

2. Community- Based reach by Mentor Champions

GULU	Total
Male: 65	140
Female: 75	

WAKISO	Total
Male: 39	97
Female: 58	

3. Mental Health Campaigns (Wakiso Only)

Gender	Total
Male: 278	723
Female: 445	

4. Social Contact Activities (Wakiso Only)

Gender	Total
Male: 26	96
Female: 70	

5. Referrals Made (Gulu Only)

Gender	Total
Male: 03	13
Female: 10	

c) Stories of Change

Mental Health Uganda (MHU) is a membership-based organization composed of individuals with lived experiences of mental illness and their caregivers. The "Creating Stories of Change" initiative seeks to improve the economic and mental well-being of over 550 members in Soroti District and 340 members in Butambala District. Originating from the "Equal Access to Grants" pilot in Lira and Kole, this project expands access to small grants, training, and storytelling to build confidence, self-worth, and independence among members.

Key Achievements

- The project was launched in Soroti, where previous beneficiaries from the pilot phase in Lira facilitated cross-learning sessions to inspire and prepare new participants.
- Mobilization began for over 550 members in Soroti and Serere districts, creating awareness and enthusiasm for the opportunities the project provides.
- UGX 30 million has been allocated for economic empowerment initiatives, and UGX 5 million for creative, craft-based ventures among members – further supporting their mental and financial resilience.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- The need for economic empowerment continues to rise among persons with mental health conditions, exceeding the current scope of support. This highlights the necessity for diversified partnerships and innovative funding models to meet growing demand.
- A key takeaway has been the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in delivering sustainable support and scaling the impact beyond initial grant provision.

Way Forward

- Organize entry workshops to introduce project goals and processes to members
- Facilitate capacity-building workshops on grant application and implementation
- Disburse more than UGX 30 million in small grants to boost member-led initiatives



Mobilization and registration of members in Soroti

This quarter, over 890 members were mobilized across Soroti and Butambala, and UGX 35 million was committed to income-generating activities—demonstrating our continued investment in community-based mental health sustainability.

Over 550 members – Soroti

Over 340 members – Butambala

UGX 35 million – Grants



Stakeholders, partners, and MHU staff in a MEL Framework development workshop in Lira City

Voices from the Field

"It was my first time speaking to someone who understood me. I felt heard. The call gave me hope."
– Anonymous Helpline beneficiary



Restoring Confidence through Psychosocial Support

In one of the project schools in Gulu City, a 17-year-old student experienced bullying and name-calling related to his background. This distressing experience began to affect his classroom participation, self-esteem, and communication. Known to be vibrant and articulate, he gradually withdrew from his peers and developed difficulties expressing himself in public settings.

With support from a trained mental health champion and mentor, the student received Psychological First Aid and Psychoeducation. These services helped him develop skills to manage his emotions and restore his confidence. Follow-up efforts also involved engaging with classmates to address the effects of bullying and promote supportive peer relationships.

He has since reported feeling more comfortable in school and noticed improvements in his concentration and academic performance. "My friends have stopped bullying me. I can now concentrate in class. Thank you for helping me!" he shared. His story is one of many that show how early intervention and peer-led support can transform the school experience for young people facing mental health challenges.

Finding Hope Again: Ivan's Story with the Mental Health Uganda Helpline

At 28 years old, Kasule Ivan, a boda boda rider living in Nansana, found himself at one of the lowest points in his life. Once a taxi driver, Ivan's world had started to crumble under the weight of overwhelming personal challenges — a painful breakup, a lingering court case, and the deep loneliness that followed. His struggles led him to lose not just friends and customers, but also hope itself.

"I felt abandoned," Ivan shares. "I believed that people were only there to disappoint, and that you couldn't trust anyone to stand by you when you needed them most."

In his search for support, Ivan first turned to his community — visiting a pastor on a friend's advice — but was asked for a fee he could not afford. Disheartened, he thought he was out of options. But that same friend didn't give up. They connected Ivan to the Mental Health Uganda Helpline — a service that would change his life forever.

"I couldn't believe it at first," Ivan recalls. "They told me the call and counseling would be free. In Uganda, where help often comes with a price tag, this felt almost too good to be true."

Through a series of compassionate counseling sessions over the Helpline, Ivan found a renewed sense of belonging and hope. The kindness, patience, and understanding he received made a profound impact — not just on him, but on his family, friends, and even the customers he served every day.

"Before, if someone annoyed me, I would react with anger. Now, I just smile and say, 'Maybe you need mental health support.' I've learned how to manage my emotions, and my whole outlook has changed," Ivan says with a laugh.

Ivan's experience with Mental Health Uganda showed him that true support exists — without conditions, without judgment, and without asking for anything in return. He now shares his story openly, hoping to challenge the negative mindset that says, "no one helps you without wanting something back."

"Silence is dangerous," he says. "If you're struggling, speak out. Help is there — you just have to reach out."

If you or someone you know needs support, call the Mental Health Uganda Toll-Free Helpline on 0800 21 21 21 — available Monday to Friday, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM.

You are not alone. Help is just a call away.

Reflecting on his journey, Ivan adds:

"Even after our first calls, Mental Health Uganda kept checking in on me. They made me feel valued and cared for – like family. Even if I lost all my friends, having Mental Health Uganda would be enough for me."

Today, Ivan lives with a renewed sense of peace, purpose, and resilience. His story is a testament to the life-changing power of free, accessible mental health support – and to the hope that even in the darkest moments, brighter days are possible.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Human Rights & Inclusion:

Upholding human rights and promoting the inclusion of persons with mental health conditions remained a central pillar of our work during Q1. We continued our advocacy for the rights of persons with lived experience, engaged in community sensitization activities, and strengthened partnerships to push for systemic change. Notably, we initiated steps to register with Lifeline International, a global organization dedicated to suicide prevention and decriminalization, signaling our commitment to advancing efforts toward decriminalizing suicide in Uganda and promoting a more compassionate legal framework.

Media & Advocacy:

Strategic partnerships with media outlets and civil society actors helped amplify our messages during Q1. Key highlights include coverage of the Mityana Health Camp, a feature on NBS TV's "Amasengejje" evening news following our participation in the Tubere Balamu Health Camp, and delivery of corporate mental health talks.



Events & Key Activities

Throughout Q1, Mental Health Uganda actively participated in a range of events and activities designed to extend mental health support, awareness, and advocacy to different communities.

📌 Tubere Balamu Health Camp

We participated in the Tubere Balamu Health Camp, where we provided mental health education, psychosocial support, and referrals, complementing the range of health services offered. Our involvement contributed to raising awareness about mental health in the community, impacting many individuals who benefited from our services.



Guests interact with MHU staff during the Tubere Balamu Health Camp



Students Visiting MHU tent at the Health Camp

📌 School Mental Health Awareness Campaigns

We conducted School Mental Health Awareness Campaigns in Gulu and Wakiso, part of our ongoing Youth Mental Health Project. These campaigns focused on promoting mental well-being among young people through peer-led interventions and psychosocial support activities, empowering students to prioritize mental health and create supportive school environments.



Drama performance during School Mental health campaign I

Join Us in Welcoming Jackline W. Nafuna



We are excited to welcome our new Program Manager, Jackline W. Nafuna, who joined us in February 2025. With over a decade of experience in gender, education, policy advocacy, social protection, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), she brings fresh insight and new strength to our strategic direction and program sustainability.

Jackline's recent leadership in the Youth Mental Health Project was instrumental in reaching over 10,000 students and 100,000 community members, showcasing her commitment to improving mental well-being in diverse communities.

We're confident that Jackline's expertise will further enhance our impact and support our mission to advance mental health across Uganda.

CALL TO ACTION

 Call our toll-free helpline: 0800 21 21 21 (Mon–Fri, 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM)

 Follow Mental Health Uganda on all social media platforms

 Support our work or join our activities during Mental Health Awareness Month in May



KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US

Email: info@mhu.ug

Telephone: 0392178953

SOCIALS

Facebook: Mental Health Uganda

Twitter(X) @MentalHealth_Ug

Instagram: mental_health_uganda

LinkedIn: mentalhealthuganda

TOLL FREE NUMBER: 0800 21 21 21

AVAILABLE

MONDAY TO FRIDAY 8: 30AM TO 5: 00PM

OUR PARTNERS



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**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**



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