



# MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATIONS CHANGE LIVES

## EDITORIAL NOTE



Dear friends and partners,

Quarter Two of 2025 has been a season of growth, resilience, and deepened impact. Through our partnership projects, including CADIR, the Youth Mental Health Project, and Stories of Change, we have continued to extend mental health awareness and services to schools, communities, and families across Uganda.

Our toll-free helpline remains at the heart of this work, reaching hundreds of individuals with counselling and referrals, while our champions in schools and communities are breaking barriers of stigma and silence. The launch of Stories of Change has further expanded opportunities for economic inclusion and empowerment for persons with psychosocial disabilities.

I am inspired by the dedication of our partners, the commitment of our staff, and the courage of the people we serve. As we look to the next quarter, our resolve is stronger than ever to keep building safe spaces, to amplify the voices of youth and persons with psychosocial disabilities, and to ensure that mental health is recognized as a priority for all.

Together, we are proving that change is possible, and that with compassion and collective action, no one should be left behind.

Warm regards,  
Derrick Kizza Mbuga  
Executive Director, Mental Health Uganda

## HIGHLIGHT

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**OUR PROJECTS  
IN FOCUS**

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**COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH  
UPDATES**

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**HELPLINE  
SPOTLIGHT**

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**IMPACT IN  
NUMBERS**

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**SUCCESS  
STORIES**

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# NEWSLETTER

**QUARTER 2  
2025**

# OUR PROGRAMS

## COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS (CADIR) PROJECT

Mental Health Uganda (MHU), in partnership with Youth Mental Health Norway and with support from the Atlas Alliance, is now implementing a five-year (2025–2029) program titled “Collective Action for Disability Rights (CADIR)”.

**Program Goal:** To ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are fulfilled in the Atlas Alliance countries, with a focus on Uganda.

The CADIR Program seeks to strengthen the ability of persons with disabilities and their families in Uganda to achieve full inclusion in all areas of society—through greater participation in decision-making processes and improved access to services across various sectors.

The program is delivered by a consortium of five partners, including MHU. Within this framework, MHU’s primary focus is on health and rehabilitation, as well as human rights advocacy for and with people with psychosocial disabilities.

***“Teletherapy is transforming mental health care in Uganda, showing that compassionate, youth-centered support can break the barriers of distance, stigma and silence, bringing help, hope and healing with just a call”***



Within the CADIR framework, MHU’s primary focus is on health and rehabilitation, as well as human rights advocacy for and with people with psychosocial disabilities.

A key service under this program is the MHU Toll-Free Mental Health Helpline – 0800 212121. Through this line, people with psychosocial disabilities, their families, and the wider community can access free, confidential tele-counselling, mental health information, and referral services.



In Quarter 2 alone, 746 tele-counselling sessions were conducted, addressing concerns such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse, with many callers citing triggers like unemployment, relationship challenges, and academic or work-related stress.

By promoting the toll-free helpline in communities, schools, workplaces, and through media campaigns, CADIR is ensuring that support is just a phone call away and is helping more people access the services they need to participate fully in society.

Free, confidential mental health support is just a call away.

Get counselling, information and referrals for yourself or someone you care about.  
Available to everyone in Uganda.



**0800 21 21 21**

Monday-Friday: 8:30AM-5:00PM

## Key Achievements

- In Q2, 16 peer support group members from eight sub-counties in Kanungu District were trained to provide psychological first aid to people with psychosocial disabilities and raise mental health awareness to reduce stigma, abuse, and discrimination.
- A total of 746 tele-counselling sessions reached 368 people (201 female, 167 male) across all age groups. Common concerns included depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse, often triggered by unemployment, relationship challenges, academic stress, and work-related stress.
- Media awareness campaigns included five radio talk shows, three television talk shows, and three X-Space sessions, reaching over 50,000 people in Kampala and six target districts. These platforms promoted the MHU toll-free line 0800 212121.
- The annual budget, results framework, and work plan were finalized to guide implementation. Two strategic frameworks, the Community Outreach Strategy and the Private Sector Engagement Strategy, were developed to increase visibility of the toll-free line and strengthen resource mobilization.

- In partnership with the Kabaka Foundation, mental health services were delivered to over 10,000 people at Wankulukuku Stadium, with 82 individuals screened for conditions such as depression, generalized anxiety, stress-related disorders, and psychoses.
- A mental health talk on emotional resilience and self-care reached 150 Prudential Insurance clients.
- A delegation from Youth Mental Health Norway visited partner schools, engaged with students, influencers, and policymakers, and documented project stories. A documentary from this visit will be used to support advocacy and fundraising in Norway.

## Challenges

- Internet disruptions interrupted tele-counselling sessions, delayed documentation of client data, and affected timely follow-ups. This reduced the number of people we could reach and slowed service delivery.
- Language barriers limited our ability to support some callers from refugee communities, particularly in West Nile and other regions, where there was no available interpreter for certain languages. This left some cases unresolved or referred elsewhere.

## Way Forward

- Project inception meetings will be held in six implementing districts to introduce CADIR objectives, engage local leaders, and build community ownership from the start.
- CADIR consortium partners will be trained on the basics of mental health and psychosocial support to ensure consistent, high-quality services are offered across all implementing areas.
- Visibility of the toll-free line will be boosted through targeted partner engagement, community events, active social media presence, radio talk shows, and distribution of IEC materials. This aims to make more people aware of where and how to get help.
- Suicide Prevention Awareness Day and Month will be commemorated in September 2025 with outreach activities, public dialogues, and campaigns to break the silence around suicide.
- Tele-counselling and general mental health information services will continue, ensuring people across Uganda can access timely, confidential, and free support.
- Staff will receive training on child protection and safeguarding to strengthen our capacity to protect vulnerable groups, especially children.
- Membership registers will be updated in all six implementing districts to maintain accurate records for effective service delivery and follow-up.

## Impacts in Numbers



**16**

peer support group members trained in psychological first aid.



**746**

tele-counselling sessions conducted



**368**

people reached through tele-counselling (201 female, 167 male)



**50,000+**

people reached through media awareness campaigns



**82**

people screened for mental health conditions at community events



**10,000**

people engaged through partnerships and outreach events



**150**

participants reached in emotional resilience and self-care sessions

## Asha's Journey to Healing

At 24, Asha was overwhelmed by stress and fear after bullying, conflict at home, and a decline in her physical health. Calling the MHU toll-free helpline (0800 212121) connected her to a therapist who guided her through trauma-focused therapies and creative expression. Today, Asha feels calmer, more confident, and equipped with coping skills to protect her well-being and safety. Her story is a reminder that with the right support, healing is possible.





Youth Mental Health Norway delegation with MHU staff during a visit to document stories for global advocacy.



MHU staff train peer support members in Kanungu District on psychological first aid.



MHU staff conduct mental health screenings during the Wankulukuku Stadium outreach.



MHU staff take part in a radio talkshow to promote mental health and the toll-free line.



Staff facilitate a session on emotional resilience and self-care for Prudential Sales agents





# YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

Mental Health Uganda, in partnership with SOS Children's Village Uganda and supported by Operation Day's Work (ODW), is implementing a three-year initiative (2023–2025) to improve adolescent mental health in eight pilot schools across Gulu and Wakiso districts. Using a peer-to-peer model, trained student Mental Health Champions, Mentor Champions, and focal teachers are breaking stigma, promoting awareness, and providing timely psychosocial support.

## Key Achievements

- Youth-led School Campaigns: Six campaigns in Gulu and Wakiso reached over 8,000 students with messages on mental wellness, stigma reduction, and peer support.
  - Community Outreach: In Lukodi Sub-county, Gulu, 600 community members received mental health information, and 91 people were screened, with 74 diagnosed and referred for treatment.
  - National Dialogue: Student champions and a focal teacher shared best practices during an X Space discussion on school mental health.
  - Parliament Engagement: Four champions joined a high-level panel at the Mental Health Awareness Camp in Parliament under the theme "Breaking Barriers – accessible mental health services for all."
  - Men's Mental Health Initiative: A mentor champion formed "The Eccelectics" WhatsApp group, creating a safe space for 30 young men to share and support each other.
  - Day of the African Child: Champions participated in celebrations at SOS Kakiri, highlighting children's rights and school mental health issues.
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  - Day of the African Child: Champions participated in celebrations at SOS Kakiri, highlighting children's rights and school mental health issues.

## Challenges

- Limited time during school assemblies has affected the consistency of Mental Health Champions in delivering awareness sessions.
- Parental engagement on mental health remains low, with no continuous strategy to involve parents and caregivers. This gap contributes to ongoing stigma and lack of support for affected youth at home.
- Training for school mental health clubs has been delayed, leaving many members (other than the champions) without the skills to provide basic support such as psychological first aid to their peers.

## Lessons Learned

Ongoing youth empowerment strengthens school mental health programs. Community outreach increases access to services, while peer-led approaches promote sustainability and safe spaces for dialogue. The MHU toll-free helpline remains a vital referral option.

## Next Steps

School mental health clubs will receive structured training to equip members with skills in psychological first aid, peer education, and referral pathways. This will strengthen their role in supporting fellow students and sustaining mental health activities beyond the project period.

Community engagement will be expanded through outreach events, awareness campaigns, and collaboration with local leaders to improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma at household and community levels.

Referral pathways will be strengthened by promoting both in-person support services and the MHU toll-free helpline, ensuring students and community members can access timely, professional mental health assistance.



Students at St. Mbaaga's College use skits, songs, and poetry to raise mental health awareness and promote peer support.



Community outreach in Lukodi, Gulu, with mental health screening and awareness.



School Mental Health Champions and a focal teacher present at Parliament.

## Youth Mental Health Project – Q2 2025 Impact

### Gulu District

- **224** students reached through PFA and peer education in schools (104 female, 122 male)
- **79** community members reached by mentor champions (48 male, 31 female)
- **10** referrals made to the MHU helpline and other institutions (6 female, 4 male)
- **15** referrals to mentor champions and focal teachers (9 female, 6 male)
- **4** school awareness campaigns reaching 8,000 students.
- **1,600** people reached through talk shows and community outreach.
- **11** review meetings conducted

### Wakiso District

- **271** students reached through PFA and peer education (164 female, 107 male)
- **127** community members reached (92 female, 35 male)
- **7** referrals to the MHU helpline (4 female, 3 male)



# STORIES OF CHANGE

Implemented by SIND – Landsforeningen for psykisk sundhed (SMH) and Mental Health Uganda (MHU), Stories of Change is a 24-month initiative (January 2025 – December 2026) building on a successful pilot that tested a Project-Based Grant Facility. The project targets 1,400 people with mental disabilities (70% women) in Lira, Soroti, and Butambala Districts, along with caregivers, families, and local duty bearers. Its goal is to foster financial inclusion, skills development, and advocacy for greater representation in government and disability structures.

It expands the grant model to new districts while strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems, introducing craft psychology interventions, and promoting cross-district learning and stakeholder engagement to reduce stigma and support recovery.

## Key Achievements

- Mobilized **620** beneficiaries from Soroti City, Soroti District, and Serere District, building a strong base of engaged project participants.
- Supported **590** members to take part in entry workshops across three clusters, introducing them to the grant facility and capacity-building opportunities.
- Trained **30** members in craft psychology, equipping them with creative skills that support both mental well-being and income generation.
- Trained **185** members in grant application processes, improving their ability to compete for funding and manage small-scale projects.
- Appraised **143** grant applications to identify the most viable proposals for support in the next project phase.



Project members actively participate in an entry workshop in Soroti City.

## Challenges

Many project members live with ongoing mental health conditions, which means activities often need more time, flexibility, and tailored support to ensure everyone participates meaningfully. This has required careful planning and additional follow-up from project staff.

## Lessons Learned

There is a need to include reasonable accommodation planning for persons with psychosocial disabilities to participate fully in project activities.



MHU Executive Director Derrick Kizza Mbuga addresses members during the workshop.

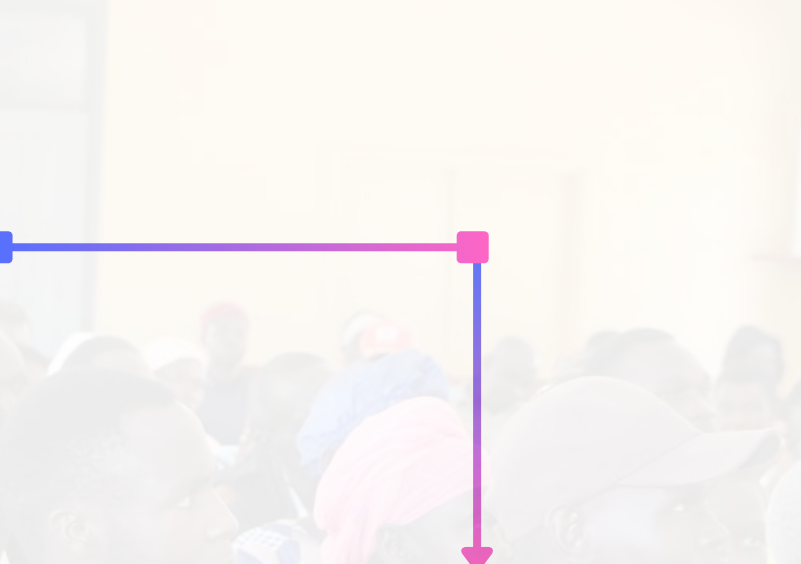


## Next Steps

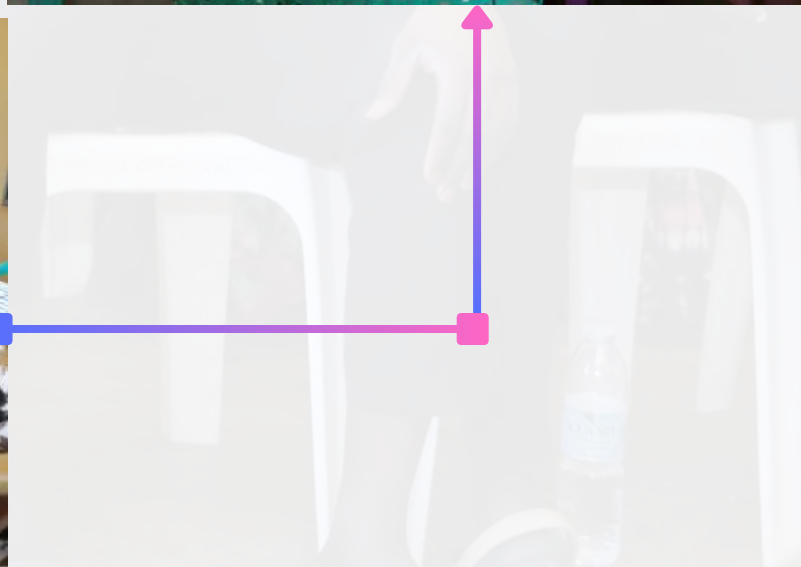
In Quarter 3, grants will be disbursed to the top-rated applications, enabling selected members to put their business and livelihood ideas into action.

Mapped partners will be activated to provide mentorship, coaching, and technical support, ensuring that grant recipients can manage their projects effectively and sustainably.

The project will also roll out implementation in Butambala District, expanding reach to a new area and strengthening inclusion efforts across all three target districts.



Project members sit in small clusters during capacity-building sessions, brainstorming ideas to develop strong proposals for the grant application.





# KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US

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## **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**

