

# MENTAL HEALTH COALITION OF SIERRA LEONE



An initiative coordinated by Enabling Access to Mental Health in Sierra Leone  
& funded by the European Union

COALITION NEWSLETTER



Quarterly Newsletter Volume 2

September Edition

## A Great Stride!

### REPORT ON WORKSHOP ON COALITION BUILDING OF AUGUST 2012

**The coalition ones again made a great stride in Sierra Leone through its annual two days workshop.**

The workshop which was slated for Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2012 was held at the Christian Health Association of Sierra Leone (CHASL), 4b King Harman Road, Freetown.

The conference hosted forty-eight (48) Participants representing twenty-three (23) different organizations.

The session had a formal opening ceremony in which the following people made opening statements made by Mr. Tom Ashwanden of the European Commission and Dr. Andrew T. Muana of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.



#### Facilitators and Topics:

Seven individuals were asked to make presentations on topics such as:

Human Rights and Mental Health in Low and Middle Income countries (LMIC) by Patrick James Taylor of Human Rights/Sierra Leone.

A movie Psychiatry Unchained facilitated by Heather Weaver of the Enabling Access Coordinating office.

Aminata Kobie from the WHO, presented on the Quality Rights Tool Kit for action.

Prof: Oye Guruje from mhLAP presented on General Health and Mental Health in LMIC- Challenges and opportunities

Victor Koroma from Health Alert and a legal practitioner from ADVOCAID talked on the Role of Stakeholders in Advocacy citing success stories.



The entire session was climaxed with a workshop facilitated by the Coalition Chairperson and Vice () Mr. Walter Carew and Dr. Gladys Palmer on Priority Goal Setting and Approaches. This activity attracted both the national radio and television broadcasting Service (The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Cooperation) and therefore had it in the national news for two days.

Each participant was presented with a file containing a spiral book, pen, time-table and evaluation form. Tea breaks and Lunch were served to all who attended.



#### Evaluation:

Both Quantitative and qualitative reports were made:

Aminata Mansaray from Marie Day's Centre said the workshop is paying off and very rewarding.



#### Editorial

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly publication of the Mental Health Coalition Newsletter. The theme for this newsletter is "Facing the realities of Mental Health Issues". People have suffered and continue to suffer silently on mental health illnesses and most often than not are abandoned by their families.

Based on this background, the Mental Health Coalition was formed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 2011 to raise awareness, advocate and lobby with stakeholders to bring about change in Mental Health Issues in Sierra Leone.

Hope you enjoy reading this article and become ignited in the process, to help us make an impact in Mental Health issues.

*Nancy D. Koroma*



*Editor in Charge*

Ansinnu Lamin: Like it was at the training in Ibadan, each topic and the selected facilitators were excellently chosen.

A service user (anonymous). It is not surprising; all programs organized by the project had been very rewarding.

The Session was concluded with the presentation of certificates and a priority goal setting which was facilitated by the Chairman and Vice of the Mental Health Coalition of Sierra Leone. The proposed goals were to be looked into by the Coalition Executive and map the way forward.



Submitted by:  
Joshua A. Duncan  
Project Coordinator (EAMH-CoR)

**The Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Program (mhLAP)**

**mhLAP is an Australian Government funded project with technical input of CBM through the University of Ibadan, Department of Psychiatry and WHO Collaborating Centre.** It has Professor Oye Gureje as the General Coordinator and Woye as Project Coordinator (all based in Nigeria). Joshua Abioseh Duncan is the country facilitator.

**A Short description of the project**

In 2007, a landmark series of papers published by the *Lancet* medical journal established psychosocial disabilities as a priority in addressing unmet health needs globally. It ended by calling for a significant scale-up of services for people with mental disorders, but recognized some barriers that have made previous efforts falter as in the case of Sierra Leone. This included poor public health skills among leaders in mental health who were unable to sustain strong advocacy for program development at a national level. This has resulted in mental health remaining a low priority in most African nations despite significant progress in recognizing and responding to these needs in other regions, and a strong evidence-base for effective services at affordable costs in low income settings

- To be able to achieve its goal the mhLAP is designed to:
  - Facilitate a yearly training on mental and related issues
  - Conduct a one week agenda and plan of action workshops
  - Formation of a Stakeholders Council
  - Supporting Advocacy Efforts

The project has just concluded a country wide qualitative and quantitative situational analysis on mental health in Sierra Leone focusing on major key players Like Government , Service Users/Providers and their Relatives.



The already formed and Launched Stakeholders' Council has now merged with the Mental Health Coalition of Sierra Leone, a project facilitated by the Enabling Access to Mental Health-City of Rest (funded by the European Commission).

The one week workshop in Ibadan, Nigeria, has helped the project to set an appropriate and unified advocacy agenda reflecting its experience in his country's context. The council is now planning to bring its priority issues to the government and other such related policy bodies. The project sponsored five participants for a week training on Leadership and advocacy skills.



**ENABLING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH IN SIERRA LEONE**

The Enabling Access to Mental Health (EAMH-SL) project in Sierra Leone is a partnership between the City of Rest Rehabilitation Centre, Community Association of Psychosocial Services, and the University of Makeni. International partners are the Global Initiative in Psychiatry and CBM.

EAMH-SL is a European Commission-sponsored project, design to meet mental health needs in Sierra Leone. It is a five year project that began in April, 2011.

This newsletter serves to facilitate communication and information sharing among Coalition members; raise awareness on activities related to mental health in Sierra Leone; update and present progress on the National Mental Health program and on the Enabling Access to Mental Health Project; in addition to providing notification on upcoming events.



Thanks to Enabling Access to Mental Health who also sponsored four more to this training. Mental Health workers to this training  
More Advocacy directions are still being explored by the coalition.

Submitted by:  
Joshua A. Duncan  
Country Facilitator (mhLAP)

**The Awareness Raising Committee**

The awareness raising committee is one of the committees set up by the mental health coalition of S/L to raise awareness on mental health and its related issues. The committee is headed by Mr. Ansinu Lamin who happens to be the Project Coordinator for the Community Association for Psychosocial Services (CAPS), one of the partners implementing the Enabling Access to Mental Health E C Project in S/L. This committee has a membership of 15, comprising representatives from different agencies and Government line ministries. The Health Education department under the ministry of Health and Sanitation is playing a pivotal role in this committee.



**The committee at work**

Presently, the committee is engage in the production of awareness raising materials on mental health that can be used to educate the wider public.

These include leaflets, posters and a booklet. Issues discussed in these reading materials will include what mental health is, mental health policy and legislature, information about drugs and treatment options, restrain and stigma, mental health global picture etc.

The committee has held four meetings in the Enabling access to mental

health Project Administration office at Bass street, Brookfield's in Freetown. Through these meetings, the committee has successfully completed the production of two posters and the leaflets. The committee



hopes to do pretesting of all the materials produced in a coalition general meeting before the printing. In complimenting this work, the committee shall be producing jingles, drama and at the same time engage in radio discus-

sions right through the country to fully educate the people on mental health.

Submitted by:  
Ansinu Lamin  
Project Coordinator (CAPS)

**MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SIERRA LEONE**

Mental illness can be caused by diverse factors, such as stressful life, brain disease, heredity, gene, spiritual problem and drug and alcohol abuse to name but few, it is unfortunate to know that in Sierra Leone beside the traumatic experience of the war, most youths are being induced by common drug cannabis-sativa. Authoritative source have confirmed that cannabis-sativa (Jamba) is now largely cultivated in all part in Sierra Leone except Bonthe district. In this piece I am paying attention to substance abuse as one of the factors for mental illness.

Marijuana is usually smoked, but can be eaten however; it has been proven to have several health hazards. It interferes with short-term memory and ability to learn and understand. It affects coordination and reduces judgment, abilities that should be unimpaired when, for example, one drives a car or handle machinery. It damages the lungs and contains more cancer causing agents then tobacco. The most vocal of the proponents of recreational drug use are those who smoke marijuana. They argue that marijuana is not addictive and has many beneficial qualities, unlike the "harder" drugs. But recent research has shown that even marijuana may have more harmful physical, mental, and psychomotor effects than first believed, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that marijuana users can become psychologically dependent, and therefore addicted.

Marijuana is illegal in Sierra Leone because it is a direct threat to the good health and well being of people who smoke and eat it, as well as indirect threat to the safety of innocent people who do not. Marijuana may not only shorten the lives of people who use it like all other illegal drugs, but may also destroy minds, make people suffer, prevent them from working, wreck families and turn innocent people into criminals who seal property, rape, assault or kill.

Marijuana is widely used by people from various backgrounds in Sierra Leone, from ghetto youth to University student, security legal luminaries, lecturers, judges, paramount Chiefs to name but a few. Sierra Leones' senior psychiatrist Dr. Nahim has on numerous occasions through Radio and Television programmes, workshop and public lecture explicitly outlined the dangers of cannabis-sativa and the negative impact it will have on our nation if it is not put under control, but it appears nobody is paying attention, this is why the Foundation for Democratic Initiative and Development (FDID) is now championing a vigorous campaign against drug abuse and violence by young people in Sierra Leone.

According to Dr. Edward Nahim the most commonly abused drug in Sierra Leone is the locally grown-marijuana/"Jamba".

Marijuana are highly addictive and cause a multitude of health and social problem for drug abusers, ranging from psychotic episodes, anxiety, depression and road traffic accident leading to death. Drug addiction disrupts family life, with domestic violence, assault, poor schooling/academic achievement, unprotected sexual intercourse thereby ending up with sexually transmitted diseases, Hepatitis B&C and HIV infection and untimely death. Quoting Dr. Edward Nahim "About 90 percent of all mental health cases in this country (Sierra Leone) I have dealt with are related to substance abuse, it is alarming"

**Did you hear that?**

Saa Matthias BENDU- FDID-SL

**DISCET COUNSELLING CENTRE**

49 Soldier Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone

As a result of the physical and emotional hurts many Sierra Leoneans suffered during the 11 years civil in Sierra Leone, the vision of establishing Diakonia Interdenominational Services for Counselling, Evangelism and Teaching (DISCET) was born 14 years ago by Rev. Canon. Dr. Modupeh Taylor – Pearce .One very important component of Diakonia Interdenominational Services for Counselling Evangelism and Teaching (DISCET) is Psycho-social Counselling. DISCET runs a counselling centre that operates the following units:

**One to One Counselling:** People suffering from different forms of emotional challenges such as anger, low self -esteem, rejection, stress, trauma, depression, anxiety ,marital problems, etc. come to DISCET Counselling centre for psycho-social counselling and as to date 90% of cases reported or referred to DISCET Counselling has been very successful

**Group counselling:** Organisations ,Schools ,Institutions and Churches call regularly on DISCET Counselling centre for group counselling, major areas handled by the organisation are; Leadership, Marriage and Courtship, Conflict management, Pastoral skills training and Communication skills

**Professional Counselling Training:** DISCET runs a professional counselling training school to train counsellors to meet the psycho social counselling needs in Sierra Leone. Tradition and eleven years of civil war has affected the hearts and minds of many Sierra Leoneans in a negative way, Depression, Stress and violence are now the order of the day in many lives, Homes and Organisations. The need for professional counsellors to handle these numerous emotional challenges is really high. To

address this very important social need DISCET started a Counselling training three years ago and have trained 32 professional counsellors from all walks of life. At present the counselling training school has 12 counsellors on their roll and look forward to the cooperation of other organisations to train more counsellors from all walks of life in the country. DISCET is also extending her training of professional counsellors to Bo city in the southern province and Kono in the Eastern province of Sierra Leone, to meet the counselling needs of people in those areas of the country.



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BRITISH  
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FREETOWN,  
SIERRA LEONE**

**Marriage Preparation and Marriage Enrichment:** This programme is design to prepare couples into marriage and equip married couples with major tools that will not only guide them through their married years but help them to understand the mechanics of living together irrespective of their different backgrounds.

One important fact in life is that no one is legally given a driver's licenses without going through a driving school, but many get married without going through a good counselling session. That explains why we have many divorce cases and a large number of marital challenges and emotional crisis at counselling centres, Psycho-Social counselling is one very important tool in the society to effect a change because, the Counsellor possesses tools that empowers him/her go deep into the root cause of the problem, walks with the client through it all and allow the client to come up with action plans in resolving the challenge. The presenting problem is not usually the real problem but once the root is handled the "presenting problem" is healed.

Submitted by:  
George Bindi  
DISCET

Our quarterly newsletter offers you the opportunity of making contributions to its periodic bulletin. You can send in identified challenges that need to be reviewed or changed, available opportunities that could be seized, and information for dissemination. You can take advantage of this opportunity by sending your contributions to the contact information below:

City of Rest Rehabilitation Centre, 34 Fort Street, Freetown, Phone: +232 (0) 78 982 554, Email:

[info@enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com](mailto:info@enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com)

Please enter comments, views, observations, and input at:

<http://enablingaccesstomentalhealthsl.com/>



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