

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Learn about one of our incredible partners in Uganda, The Alive Again Foundation and their founder, Wilbroad.



An interview with Wilbroad

This past week, we had the opportunity to interview Wilbroad Kabagambe. Wilbroad is a mental health worker in Uganda and founded The Alive Again Foundation. We covered a variety of topics, including the story behind the foundation and it's powerful name, how their initiatives have nearly eliminated suicide re-attempts among their service group members, and how he explains mental health to community members and leaders alike.



OVERVIEW

- The Alive Again Foundation
- Creating a suicide support group in Uganda
- Shifting elder perspectives on mental health

"It is not physical, you cannot touch it, so trying to explain mental health to make it simple is as follows. It is how we feel, behave, and react. It is the ability to live life productively and harmoniously with others. It is how we handle day-to-day stresses and challenges of life"

-Wilbroad Kabagambe

The Interview

By Riyan Visram

with Wilbroad Kabagambe

Q: What is The Alive Again Foundation?

A: From the start in 2017, we realized our goal was to help community members feel better and regain their sense of value. We wanted to restore integrity among the people so that they could live their life fully again. They were hopeless and life was meaningless for the people we came to work with. We wanted to help them regain that meaning. Our mission is to make people feel good, hopeful, and have a reason to live.

Q: How do you make someone "Alive Again"?

A: Initially, the only activity we had was counselling and psychosocial support. The first step is ensuring that when people have problems, informing them that ending their lives isn't the solution. There's more to life, everything you're going through, there is hope ahead. We gave people options to life through solutions. If they wanted to end their life because of financial problems, we partnered them with a professional who could provide them financial literacy. That was our approach, trying to provide alternatives and resources to people who had different psychosocial problems.

Q: What stigmas exist in Uganda about mental health?

A: Before these interventions were put in place, people who had a mental illness were seen as outcasts and worthless. There was a lot of wrong information in the communities, making it difficult for people to get support. Community members were taught that these illnesses were related to witchcraft. Someone who was suffering was seen as a failure in society, they would be abandoned and isolated in their own communities.

Our interventions have created and made awareness available. We haven't reached everyone, but wherever we go we, we try to eliminate these misconceptions.



Q: How did your support group start?

A: We started with only one person. I was working in a hospital as a medical social worker, doing counselling for patients and staff. I noticed we were admitting more and more people who were attempting suicide, it was growing on a daily basis. As a social worker and counsellor, I realized there was something that was not being done. That's why I thought of this initiative to address this need. I began with only one person in the support group, and as time went by, he confessed to me that he was feeling better.

From him, I brought another person, and then another. Every other person who attempted suicide, I brought them aboard, or if someone had passed away, I would bring on their family members because they too needed support to go through the grieving process. In the span of two years, the numbers grew up to one hundred people and growing.

Q: What were the benefits of the group?

Before this group, the people who had attempted suicide would get treatment and then go home. Often in the span of three to four months they would re-attempt. From the time we have started, we have not had any re-attempts. For me that is important, the re-attempts have reduced over 90%. The other benefit is an increased help-seeking behaviour. Previously people didn't seek help, but now people are aware of this support group and know there are others who have shared similar challenges.

Previously the knowledge gap was quite large about mental health, but through this support group the participant knowledge is increasing and they are learning to identify mental health and suicide issues, what they can do if someone is at risk, and we have created a safe place for someone to comfortably share their problems and people will understand it.

Q: What have been the responses from the Elders?

A: When we reach out to them, we try to break some of the wrong perceptions they may have. Their responses are mixed, some will understand, but when we give them an explanation and show them the impact of treatments. Ultimately they respond positively. As leaders and elders they have an important role to play to create awareness and fight stigma. Some of them don't realize this and when we show them the impact they could have, it is something they gladly they receive. The community outreach efforts are proving to be helpful, because the leaders and helpers can support, the community listens and they have such a wide impact.

They are doing a great job. Their opinion matters.



Passionate about mental health in Uganda?
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