

CHANGEMAKER SPOTLIGHT

Get to know Theresa Anthony, expert psychologist, gender advocate and Board Advisor at IMHA



An interview with Tessy

This past week, we had the opportunity to interview Theresa (Tessy) Anthony. Tessy is an integral part of our team here at IMHA, serving on our Advisory Board. She is passionate about female empowerment, which pushed her to create the Comfort Stream Aid Foundation. We covered a variety of topics, including how to provide support for a family member experiencing a mental illness, powerful examples of community empowerment, and the connection between participation and equality.



OVERVIEW

- Comfort Stream's Female Empowerment Workshops
- Pivoting services during COVID-19
- Responding to familial mental health needs

"A world of equality is equal voice and participation wherever they [women] are taking part. Women need to bring their ideas to the table and be heard by everyone. This is what we're fighting for. Where women can take leadership roles without discrimination and backlash."

-Tessy Anthony

The Interview

By Riyan Visram
with Tessy Anthony

Q: Can you tell me about your foundation Comfort Stream Aid?

A: [We focus] mainly on educating women, bringing awareness about mental health, and self-care. We provide psychosocial supports for women facing violence. Women have issues on the home-front, which they carry around, and at the end of the day these issues affect their lives, health, income, work, and child care. We are helping them understand that despite these issues, we can take care of ourselves to cope with these things. There are things they can do for themselves, such as words of affirmation, self-talk, and reframing their thinking. We help them plan and think ahead on their own, without someone else telling them what to do. For example, if they are facing domestic violence, as counsellors we help them explore this situation, how do you want to move on? What will you do differently?

Q: What outcomes have you seen from this work?

A: After speaking at a session we planned about mental health and self-care, I received a call from an attendee saying our session helped her realize what she was experiencing. Cont'd -->

Q: Program Outcomes (Continued).

A: She didn't know she was having issues with mental health and how her husband's treatment was violent. For the first time she was able to confront her husband and say "this is how your behaviour is making me feel." The husband was very adamant on not changing so she moved from the husband's place. She was able to realize that she was experiencing domestic violence as she, like many others, believed it was okay if she was doing something wrong.

She didn't know that alternative ways of living were available until going to our seminar and learning about the dangers of domestic violence. She is now waiting for an apology and a statement from her partner [committing to] to never engaging in violent behaviours again.



Q: How did COVID-19 impact your organization?

A: For the women we worked with, domestic violence was increasing. We continued our psychosocial supports and also implemented workshops to fill in lost wages.

We came up with livelihood training for the women we work with. This included social media management training for women who owned businesses. At the time, everyone wanted to buy things online and get it delivered to home. We conducted training to improve their online presence, that would generate income and take care of themselves and support the family. Another thing we did was skills training such as soap making and sanitizer making, as they were in high demand to stay clean and prevent COVID. The women were able to take care of themselves through the sales and also use these self-made products.

Q: How can family members respond to mental health needs in their own family?

A: Firstly, family members need to understand what stigma looks like and try as much as possible not to stigmatize the family members going through these challenges. This requires knowledge of the language, encouraging acceptance, and unconditional love irrespective of where they are. Acceptance is very important. Acceptance means not being judgemental and providing emotional support. Also, knowing when-to-refer members while being sensitive of their situation, as to avoid re-stigmatizing the person. The warning signs are something we have to be very observant of as caretakers. Instead of judging our members, we should express how we feel and ask if they are open to talk about it. Even if they aren't receptive to conversations, it's important not to get angry or irritated. This is part of acceptance. If they see they are being treated with unconditional love and respect, they may not open up immediately, but [they will] know that it an option. Acceptance, unconditional love and knowing the signs of when-to-refer are important keys in this on-going process.

Passionate about mental health in Nigeria?
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