

# WE LIVE FOR US



INTERNATIONAL MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
**PROJECT REPORT**  
SPRING 2021



# NAVIGATING THIS REPORT

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Welcome to the We Live For Us (WEL4U) Project Report from Spring 2021! We appreciate your interest in this project and invite you to peruse this report at your leisure, and welcome any follow-up questions at **teameimha.ngo**.

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**Thank you to our partners!**



Kenya Medical Psychologists Association

County Government of Mombasa

Youth for Sustainable Development

# ABOUT IMHA

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**Mission:** Our mission is to build a healthier world through collaborative innovation.

**Background:** The International Mental Health Association (IMHA, *eem-ha*) is a 501c3 non-profit based in San Francisco, California. Since forming in 2020, IMHA has collaborated with partners in Bangladesh, Canada, Kenya, Uganda, the United States and Zimbabwe to develop global mental health capacity. Our team is comprised of mental health clinicians, educators, artists, entrepreneurs and students. We value creativity, humility, flexibility and strive to operate through culturally-grounded, trauma-informed lenses.

**Current Focus Areas:** As the time of writing, our geographic foci include Africa (East, West and Southern), North America and South Asia. Our population foci include serving the African diaspora, youth and young adults, students and survivors of high control groups. Our programatic themes include the intersections of mental health and; community development, literacy, STEM education, racial justice.



*Nakujali  
I care about you!  
Usaidizi upo  
Help is available*

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR PROJECT LEADER

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*"..it was a great experience for me...I had thought mental health was a curse. People on the streets making scenes, running naked. **Based on the training, this perception is gone!**"*

At the start of this project, we knew we had an opportunity to change young people's perception of mental health, and more than the goal, that was the dream. Hearing these words from a training participant was overwhelmingly motivating.

In countries like ours, Kenya, mental health has been for a long time highly stigmatized and people living with mental illness, their families and surroundings have been discriminated against. **This has to change** and we were motivated to be part of the transformation by providing evidence based information to young people.

Despite the fact that many countries are making moves to develop their mental health infrastructure, here Kenya, we are yet to make bold moves. We have great policies – the Mental Health Policy of 2015-2030, for example, but until they are wholly implemented, we cannot claim to make significant progress.

The WEL4U Project was truly inspiring time for mental health in Kenya. The young people we worked with were incredible, they shared their stories, their motivation and it ignited hope during the training. **Young people have the power, the energy and zeal to get us on the right side of history - if we let them.**

As an enthusiastic participant put it, "If we train many youths all over the country, I think it's a program that will really help."

Thank you for your interest in the WEL4U Project, please enjoy this report detailing our outcomes from the initial three trainings and stay tuned for future updates as we roll out future trainings across Kenya!

*Damian Juma*

**DAMIAN JUMA**

East Africa Program Director



# RELEVANT CONTEXT

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## Country Profile - The Republic of Kenya

Population: 52.57 million – est. pop. 2019

### Project Focus Area

Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale are situated in coastal Kenya and are home to an estimated 3.3 million people. The region has outstanding ecosystems with rich natural resources and a diverse cultural heritage that underpin the livelihood of the coastal communities and their health seeking behaviors. It is also home to a large migrant population of diverse ethnic and racial origins. The ever growing migration into the coastal region increases competition for the already-limited natural resources that underpin coastal livelihood. This dynamic serves to exacerbate the high unemployment and poverty levels. This in-turn, impacts the mental health of the local community. The Port Reitz Hospital in Mombasa County is currently the only mental health referral hospital in the entire region.

### Strengths, Challenges & Opportunities Relevant to Mental Health

Strengths; Interest from young people, rich diversity, there are many active organizations working for mental health and evidence of current political will.

Challenges; *History of colonization, anti-LGBTQ laws, lack of funding for mental health, COVID-19 challenges, regressive laws like those criminalizing suicide, Lack of independent mental health budget, currently only 0.01% of our health budget is dedicated to mental health.*

Opportunities; President Uhuru Kenyatta has directed the formation of a taskforce to address what he called a mental health crisis across Kenya-The Taskforce recommendations included the government to declare mental health a public emergency of epidemic proportion and enhancing mental health literacy levels of the general population. The Ministry of Health has a newly announced a plan for the implementation of Kenya Mental Health Policy 2015-2030, to be worked on from 2021-2025.

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The We Live For Us (WEL4U) Project was designed, planned and implemented by and for, young people in Kenya. For our purposes, we are defining "young people" as those aged 18-25. The first phase of the training focused on mental health literacy, psychological first aid and emotional resilience. It took place in Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale Counties of the coastal region

This project was implemented in partnership with Kenya Red Cross – Youth Department (KRC). Recruitment was accomplished using social media call for applications and was coordinated by KRC with support from IMHA. Implementation took place in March 2021, during a time that was uncertain for most young people not only in Kenya but also globally. We kicked-off the initial training in Mombasa with messages from The County Government of Mombasa, The Kenya Red Cross, and members from the private sector who participated in the spirit of kindness, community and supporting mental health. Over the course of two weeks, our facilitators spent nine days training 60 participants in our three pilot counties.

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

Those selected to participate in the initial WEL4U trainings opted-in to giving feedback through a web-based pre-post survey as well as in-person with IMHA and KRC facilitators. Survey results highlight key points of success, as well as areas for improvement.



*Project participant with a passion for community mental health.*

## Survey Results

89.3% said that mental illnesses were common in their communities in the pre training survey. In the post-training survey, this number shot up to 97.8%. Notably, only 19.6% of respondents said that they were “very knowledgeable about mental health” before the training. After the training, 67.4% of the respondents said that they felt very knowledgeable about mental health. There were clear changes in participant attitudes towards suicide, as well as beliefs surrounding spirits and/or demons as contributors to mental illness. Respondents also demonstrated an increase in understanding surrounding chronic stress and the impact on mental health. Respondents rate the WEL4U training highly, with over 60% of respondents giving a 10 (using a scale of 1-10) on rating how helpful the training was.

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

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*Facilitators leading sessions during trainings in Mombasa and Kilifi, March 2020.*

Most significant to our team was 100% of respondents reporting they would talk to their friends about the training. While this does not indicate an increase in knowledge, it points to a cultural shift in the attitudes of young people towards mental health in their peer groups. While mental health has been highly stigmatized, a willingness to share about this training with friends demonstrates progress towards stigma-reduction.

## **Areas for Improvement**

Survey results showed that some clarification was needed in the wording of specific questions, to clarify meaning for the respondent. Survey results also demonstrated the need to focus on larger concepts and reinforce new knowledge throughout training. As the original training was designed to be five days in-length and this was shortened to three days during the initial roll-out, we learned that although a three-day training is possible, five days would've allowed for better absorption of material.

# KEY LEARNINGS

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1. **Young people in Kenya are ready and willing to learn about mental health.** For the initial 60 training spots, we received nearly 900 applications from enthusiastic young people across Kenya.
2. **Training young people works.** Fighting stigma is key to improving mental health outcomes in Kenya, and having conversations is an important step in this process. 100% of participants reported they would speak with their friends about the training.
3. **This kind of promotion can work for mental health.** Since the conclusion of the initial trainings, several participants have conducted follow-up activities with their families, friends and community organizations. Trainees have essentially become ambassadors for mental health in their communities, spreading their knowledge and leading the charge towards a stigma-free society where mental health is valued by all.

## NEXT STEPS

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Due to the overwhelming enthusiasm from trainees and community partners, plans are underway to continue WEL4U in three additional counties in coastal Kenya.

Pending training accessibility during the ongoing pandemic and available funding, the WEL4U Project will expand later in 2021.

To partner, support or learn about this project, please email us at [team@imha.ngo](mailto:team@imha.ngo).



# TL;DR

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For accessibility purposes, our reports include a TL;DR "too long, didn't read" section that summarizes this report for readers who have visual, attention-related or other reading differences.

**About the We Live For Us Project:** The We Live For Us (WEL4U) Project is a mental health training designed for and by, young people in Kenya. Topics covered include; mental health literacy, psychological first aid and emotional resilience. Initial trainings spanned three days and included three cohorts of 20 young people ages 18–25 in Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale Counties.

**Project Outcomes:** We surveyed participants before and after their training to gauge their knowledge on and attitudes towards mental health. Overall, most respondents reported an increase in knowledge and an increased comfortability in discussing mental health – 100% of respondents stated they would talk with their friends about the training. This is significant in a context where mental health is highly stigmatized and talking about mental health can be considered taboo or inappropriate.

## **Key Learnings:**

- Young people in Kenya are ready and willing to learn about mental health. *For the initial 60 training spots, we received nearly 900 applications from enthusiastic young people across Kenya.*
- Training young people works. *Fighting stigma is key to improving mental health outcomes in Kenya, and having conversations is an important step in this process. 100% of participants reported they would speak with their friends about the training.*
- This kind of promotion can work for mental health. *Since the conclusion of the initial trainings, several participants have conducted follow-up activities with their families, friends and community organizations. Trainees have essentially become ambassadors for mental health in their communities, spreading their knowledge and leading the charge towards a stigma-free society where mental health is valued by all.*

**Next Steps:** We plan on continuing this project and invite you to join us! To get involved, email us at [team@imha.ngo](mailto:team@imha.ngo).