Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing

A sidebar report

Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing was one of two online competitions[1] sponsored in 2009 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Changemakers, an initiative of Ashoka Innovators for the Public (Ashoka).[2] The competitions sought innovative solutions to entrenched social and health problems. Entrants posted their ideas on the Changemakers website, where social entrepreneurs from across the world provided comments and feedback. See the Program Results Report for more information about the competitions.

The *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing* competition solicited entries that demonstrated system-changing solutions that move past narrow perceptions of mental health to expand understanding and collective involvement in finding solutions. Individuals and all types of organizations from any part of the world were eligible to enter. Winning solutions had to demonstrate proof of impact.

Judges evaluated entries according to the following criteria:

- **Innovation.** The solution should be substantially different from other initiatives in the field of mental health, and be ready for large-scale expansion.
- **Social impact.** The solution must demonstrate impact on its target population, either a specific underserved community or society at large, and have the potential for global application.
- **Sustainability.** The solution must have a long-term plan for continuing financial and community support.

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[1] The other competition was *Designing for Better Health*. See the sidebar for more information about this competition.

[2] Ashoka is an Arlington, Va.-based international organization that strives to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive, and enables people throughout the world to think and act as changemakers. Changemakers is an initiative of Ashoka that aims to grow new ideas through transparency and collaboration.

AND THE WINNERS ARE…

The *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing* competition received 338 entries from 42 countries and stimulated more than 300 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Jane Isaacs Lowe, PhD, RWJF senior program officer and director of the Vulnerable Populations portfolio, chose 11 finalists. The Changemakers online community then picked three winners, with each one receiving $5,000. The following winners were announced in December 2009:

Active Minds: Empowering Students and Changing the Conversation about Mental Health on 300 Campuses

Sponsored by: Alison Malmon (United States)

The nonprofit organization, Active Minds, which is funded entirely through private contributions, establishes and supports student-run mental health awareness groups on college and university campuses in the United States, Canada and Australia. Active Minds reaches students *through* students by empowering students to tell their stories, educate their peers, and work closely with clinical service providers to break the unnecessary stigma that surrounds mental health.

With a small staff and a cadre of students and college-staff volunteers nationwide, since its founding in 2003, Active Minds has:

- Established 216 chapters on campuses in 40 states, Washington, Canada, and Australia
- Engaged more than 3,000 student advocates
- Educated college counseling center staff about the organization's mission to ensure staff support for *Active Minds* chapters
- Created and distributed guidelines and tools to promote new chapters and support existing chapters
- Emerged as a leading voice in student mental health advocacy, helping to ensure that students' voices are heard by government agencies such as the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrations.

Active Minds' near-term goal is to establish 300 campus chapters in the United States.

Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society

Sponsored by: Chencho Dorji (Bhutan)

Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society links traditional forms of mental health treatment with modern mental health practices. The acceptance of modern medicine in general, and modern psychiatric practices in particular, is a challenge in Bhutan where most people prefer traditional forms of medicine provided by religious healers, shamans, astrologers, and herbal doctors. These traditional treatments have not been effective in treating severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia.

Launched in 2002 as a pilot program of the Psychiatry Department of the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital,[3] Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society is designed to:

- Introduce modern mental health practices in traditional Bhutanese society.
- Mobilize community support to identify and treat severely mentally ill people.
- Provide a way for traditional healers and modern health workers to work together.
- Train primary health workers to diagnose and treat mental disorders in the community, whether or not they participate in the program.

The program operates in three of Bhutan's 17 districts. As of 2009 it has:

- Identified, diagnosed, and begun treating more than 300 severely mentally ill patients, including giving medications
- Trained more than 60 health workers about mental health
- Delivered mental health orientation programs to more than 500 community leaders, traditional healers, and government civil servants.
- Established successful partnerships between traditional and modern mental health workers, who have started working together to provide treatment and avoid duplication and confusion among patients
- Educated political leaders and government bureaucrats about the mental health needs of the population

The project is funded by the Government of Bhutan, which also serves as a conduit for external funding. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations such as the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA)

[3] The Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital is a public organization under the Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan.

contribute to the program. The program hopes to expand into one or two additional districts of Bhutan each year until it covers the entire country.

Rebuilding Hope After War: Mental Health and Community Recovery

Sponsored by: Pat Lee, MD, DTM&H (program operates in Liberia)

Rebuilding Hope After War, an initiative of Tiyatien Health, forges partnerships with Liberian communities to treat depression and epilepsy, reduce false beliefs about these conditions, and eliminate stigma from people who suffer from depression and epilepsy.

Tiyatien Health, founded by survivors of Liberia's twenty-year civil war, modeled this initiative on its successful HIV/AIDS program. During the Liberian civil war, combatants and civilians suffered physical and sexual abuse leading to high rates of mental illness. A random survey of Liberian adults conducted in 2008 found that 40 percent met symptom criteria for major depressive disorder and 44 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The high incidence of head trauma and infectious diseases contributes to an epilepsy rate as high as 5 percent.

Liberia has fewer than 50 public physicians serving its population of 3.5-million, making it critical for health professionals to go beyond relying solely on physicians. Rebuilding Hope After War addresses depression and epilepsy in Liberia by:

- Training nonphysician clinicians in simplified, evidence-based protocols for treating depression and epilepsy
- Employing community health workers to: identify patients, lead group counseling sessions, directly observe medication administration and monitor medication side effects, visit patients in their homes, and promote early care-seeking among neighbors
- Delivering free services through the public Tubman Hospital

The initiative produced the following results:

- The Liberian Ministry of Public Health adopted its first National Mental Health Policy in 2009
- Capacity for chronic disease care has increased in the country's forested southeast
- By hiring community health workers for the initiative, Tiyatien Health expanded its role as the largest employer of the poor in the Tchien District of Liberia.

Rebuilding Hope After War is supported through a partnership with the Liberian Ministry of Health and volunteer researchers, statisticians, epidemiologists, physicians, economists, health system experts, health consultants, and student workers. Collaborators in the United States include researchers and professionals at Harvard, Columbia, and John Hopkins universities and the University of California, San Francisco.

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