

# THE CORNER

*Weekly updates from the Social Work Training and Research Centre*



*For this issue of "The Corner," the Research Unit will be sharing with you one of our current projects.*

## **The Community Mental Health First Responders Course Project**

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The Community Mental Health First Responders Project was conceptualized and implemented by The University of the West Indies, Open Campus, Consortium for Social Development and Research, Social Work Training and Research Centre and sponsored by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), as part of phase four of the European Union (EU) funded Poverty Reduction Programme. The project was launched January 2020 in partnership with The Salvation Army (Allman Town and Jones Town core) and community-based organizations and churches in August Town.

This project was initiated by the tragic passing of a former colleague who had been struggling with mental health challenges. Additional research as well as meetings and interactions with various community members and organisations revealed that many persons, when asked, do not know the mental health services available to them nor strategies to offset poor mental health. Therefore, the Community Mental Health First Responders Project aims to normalize mental wellness as an important component of overall well-being and develop community mental health capacity by raising awareness, knowledge and skills of community members, enabling them to respond to mental health needs as it arises within their community. The target group for this project are adults, aged 18 to 65 years old, from communities in the parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew.

Thus far mental health sensitization workshops have been conducted in the three communities with 56 participants aged 19 to 64 years. They were led by facilitator, Ms. Joy Harrison, Clinical Social Worker, who used guided discussions and interactive activities to explore multiple topics related to community mental health, including:

- Common signs of good and poor mental health
- Mental health across the lifespan
- Mental Health and the family
- Mental Health- A Community Issue

**Evaluation results indicated that:**

- 91% of the participants identified that they have had self-experiences with mental health difficulties or has had contact with others, such as family members, who have/had difficulties.
- 91% of the participants agreed that the workshop has increased their knowledge in the respective subject areas covered.
- 98% of the participants agreed that the workshop was well organized and beneficial.
- 87% of the participants are interested in attending a follow up course in the area of Community Mental Health.





When asked about how they planned to use knowledge gained from the workshop in their communities, participants highlighted a variety of plans such as:

*"To sit with other friends and family members to talk about mental health so that we can go out and share it"*

*"I plan to share this information with persons in my community in regard to identifying signs of mental health issues. I can also use the information in my interactions with persons in my community."*

*"This workshop opened my eye about mental health because I have a cousin who has mental health difficulties and other persons also, so this gives me first-hand knowledge on how to in fact deal with them, even at my school. I want to pass on this informative information also."*

Please note that the comments have been edited for clarity



The next stage for this project is to conduct the Community Mental Health First Responders Course which will further the basic training provided in the workshops. At the conclusion of the course, participants will be better equipped to manage their mental health, support community mental health workers, respond to persons facing mental health difficulties, and provide support to families with relatives managing a range of mental health challenges.

*The Social Work Training and Research Centre thanks our sponsor and partners for the success of the project thus far.*

*We look forward to updating you once the project re-commences.*

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