

Staff Well-Being

*A critical element
of organizational
responses to
gender-based
violence and the
HIV epidemic*

A Learning Report



the Stephen Lewis
FOUNDATION



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Photo Credit: Eva Gilliam, Zimbabwe

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs	Antiretroviral Medicines
CABDA	Community Asset Building and Development Association
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLO	Community-led Organization
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
CWCA	Centre for Widows and Children Assistance
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OVC	Orphans and vulnerable children
PLWHA	People Living with HIV and AIDS
Ripples	Ripples International
RISE	Rights Institute for Social Empowerment
SCPC	Sophiatown Community Psychological Services
SLF	Stephen Lewis Foundation
SSI	Stepping Stones International
WAR	Women Against Rape
YWCAA	Young Women Campaign Against AIDS
WYSJ	Women and Youth for Social Justice

Executive Summary

For over two decades, the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) has supported community-led organizations (CLOs) in a partnership model rooted in feminism, anticolonialism and antiracism. Over the course of the SLF's work with its partners, gender-based violence (GBV) has been consistently raised as one of the underpinning factors driving HIV, particularly among adolescent girls. Feminist organizations in Africa have argued that the perpetual disregard of the social, political, and economic roots of oppression and exploitation, especially by governments, has contributed greatly to a rise in GBV which impacts negatively the well-being of individuals.¹

With support from the Stephen Lewis Foundation, CLOs have taken action to bridge the evident gaps in health service delivery for those impacted by gender-based violence and the HIV epidemic, with a particular focus on women and girls. These CLOs provide integrated and holistic programming that addresses the underlying causes and consequences of both GBV and HIV.

Over time, despite their commendable work, these SLF partner organizations have reported serious health-related impacts on their staff arising from their work with GBV survivors, including listening to harrowing accounts of GBV, and in some cases witnessing acts of violence first-hand. This results in staff burnout, stress, and trauma, prompting the organizations to call for improvements in the physical, emotional, mental, and financial well-being of their staff². Over the past three years in particular, uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic among individuals and communities and related rising incidents of GBV, increased anxiety amongst frontline staff and left them with little time to rest, rejuvenate and manage the stresses of the communities they work with.

Given its partner experiences, and in keeping with its anti-oppression values, the SLF responded by investing in the well-being of the staff who work tirelessly to restore dignity of the abused and vulnerable women, men, and children in their communities. When approached by the SLF, the Samworth Family Foundation, which has been an important funder of GBV related programs of SLF partners for over 13 years, agreed to provide funding for nine CLOs for staff well-being interventions. The Staff Well-being project, which began with four organizations in 2018, was expanded to cover nine organizations by the end of 2022.



Photo Credit: Eva Gilliam, Zimbabwe

¹ Towards a Transformative, Feminist Approach to Trauma in Africa: Perspectives from Practice, 2022. African Institute for Integrated Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls & HIV and AIDS and Stephen Lewis Foundation

² SLF Partner Organization Internal Narrative Reports 2019 to 2023

Throughout the project, the CLOs identified different approaches that enabled staff to come together to learn and relearn, exercise, play games, and sports and bond with each other, while sharing their stories and experiences. This served as a way of coping with stress, anxiety, and traumatic experiences. The interventions carried out included:

1. Staff retreats where staff discussed their experiences as peers and benefited from shared insights, solutions and mutual support.
2. Workshops that focused on strengthening staffs' ability to manage anxiety, trauma and stress.
3. Training on coping mechanisms to address and maintain mental well-being for frontline staff.
4. Sensitization on COVID-19 including managing community and staff anguish and anxiety.
5. Provision of nutrition packages and school dues to staff whose families faced economic hardships during COVID-19 lockdowns.
6. Improvement of work environment through the creation of safe and enabling spaces for staff to work in.

The staff who participated had a greater feeling of connectedness with their peers and the communities they serve. They became more energized and motivated to work harder. The process provided them with intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social fulfilment. They were able to achieve a greater work-life balance, which allowed them to practice wellness more deliberately, while ensuring they were better prepared to address the challenges faced by individuals and communities due to GBV and HIV.

There were several lessons learned at both the individual staff and the organizational levels:

- High demand for services and exposure to traumatic cases burdened staff, leading to increased stress and decreased performance.
- Well-being Interventions fostered staff bonding, breaking hierarchical barriers and facilitating issue resolution.
- Staff Well-being is key to organizational and staff development as it significantly impacts organizational performance and improves individual relationships with colleagues and family.
- Frontline staff are not the sole recipients of work-related stressors; other support staff also experience impacts during routine work and field trips.
- One-off well-being interventions are less effective as regular interventions yield better results and ensure sustained gains.
- Well-being interventions should be tailored to meet an organization's needs as this fosters ownership and allows for integration into the organization's strategic plans.

Partner Leaders

This report highlights insights gathered from well-being interventions conducted by nine community-led organizations. These organizations provide holistic support to those affected by gender-based violence and HIV in sub-Saharan Africa.

Community Asset Building and Development Action (CABDA) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in Kenya. Their approach supports those affected by HIV and AIDS through integrated programming, including livelihoods, nutrition, education, TB, and malaria initiatives. CABDA provides education support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), offers small loans to caregivers, assists grandmother groups, and provides skills training to youth groups.

Centre for Widows and Children Assistance (CWCA) is an NGO committed to empowering marginalized women and children and advancing their rights in Tanzania. Founded in 2003, CWCA provides legal aid and paralegal services to those who can't afford legal representation, along with legal education to raise awareness of rights and good governance. They support women, including widows, in launching businesses and provide educational support for OVCs.

Musasa supports women and children who have experienced violence, offering a wide range of services related to ending violence against women, including policy development, advocacy, and direct shelter services. They focus on providing direct support to survivors of violence, public education on violence against women, and capacity building for the justice system. Musasa established Zimbabwe's first one-stop centre for GBV survivors to access essential services.

Ripples International (RI) is a faith-based organization founded in 2002, dedicated to OVC welfare, women's empowerment, and family stability. RI addresses violence against women and children across Kenya, seeking to improve living standards through education, counselling, and rehabilitation to reduce poverty through community empowerment.

Rights Institute for Social Empowerment (RISE) aims to advance the rights and capacities of women, girls, young people, and children, eradicating their vulnerabilities to human rights violations, poverty, and social injustice in Malawi. Founded by people living with HIV and AIDS, RISE offers community-based services and fights stigma and discrimination to promote human rights.

Sophiatown Community Psychological Services (SCPS) serves communities in Sophiatown in South Africa. They focus on HIV and AIDS, bereavement, caregiving, and conflict-related distress. The organization operates two centres that address specific social issues experienced by the communities and deliver services to around 500 beneficiaries annually.

Stepping Stones International supports orphaned and vulnerable adolescents and caregivers through life skills, leadership training, psychosocial support, and community mobilization programming. Their "Strength of a Woman" initiative provides young mothers with information on sexual and reproductive health, parenting, financial literacy, income generating activities, and employability skills, including English literacy sessions.

Women Against Rape (WAR) is a women's human rights organization that primarily supports women and children experiencing violence and abuse and addresses issues that contribute to violence against women and children. With the support of the SLF, WAR has developed its shelter house, through which it has expanded its support of Botswanan women and children experiencing GBV and widened its network of partners and stakeholders. WAR operates one of two shelters in the whole country.

Young Women Campaign Against AIDS (YWCAA), now known as Women and Youth for Social Justice (WYSJ), was founded in 2000 to address climate change, GBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the HIV and AIDS responses. Their SLF-funded work focuses on capacity building and economic empowerment for bar waitresses, most of whom are grandmothers. YWCAA provides nutritional and material support to OVCs cared for by their primary target group, with a significant focus on their grandmother's movement-building program.

Project Background

According to UNAIDS, girls and women represent more than half of the 37.7 million people living with HIV³. Gender inequities, such as limited access to education, sexual and reproductive health rights, and economic instability, contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence, which serves as a significant driver of HIV transmission.

Community-led organizations play a critical role in addressing the health needs of those affected by the intersection of gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. Moreover, they also provide essential support to frontline workers who are dedicated to combating the situation. However, the demanding nature of this work, coupled with insufficient systems and infrastructure to support the well-being of these caregivers, places an enormous strain and burden on them. Over time, this strain can weaken their resilience and have a lasting detrimental impact on both the individuals providing care and the communities they serve.

Wellness and well-being are two terms that are often used interchangeably. However, much as scholars endeavour to articulate the difference between the two terms, they recognise that there exists a close linkage between the two. Some scholars have defined well-being as a positive state experienced by individuals and societies that results in good mental, emotional, physical, and psychological health.⁴ They add that this, consequently, brings happiness and prosperity to individuals, contributing to a sense of meaning, purpose, and the ability of individuals to manage stress. Scholars refer to wellness as an individual's physical health that includes diet and exercise. Therefore, well-being addresses much broader and deeper aspects of life satisfaction, in addition to physical health.⁵ Well-being is determined by deliberate actions taken to pursue interventions, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic well-being.



Photo Credit: DeLovie Kwagala, Botswana

³ UNAIDS, <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/infographics/girls-and-women-living-with-HIV> Accessed July 25, 2023

⁴ Tchiki Davis. What Is Well-Being? Definition, Types, and Well-Being Skills., Psychology Today <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/click-here-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being-definition-types-and-well-being-skills> Accessed July 25, 2023.

⁵ Wellwise. <https://www.bewellwise.com/articles/wellbeing-vs-wellness-and-why-it-matters/#::-:text=while%20'wellness'%20generally%20refers%20to%20physical%20and%20mental%20health.> Accessed July 25, 2023

For several years, CLOs in sub-Saharan Africa have made a compelling case for the need to prioritize and strengthen the well-being of staff in organizations dealing with survivors of GBV and other vulnerabilities. CLOs play a critical role in supporting survivors of GBV as the already overstretched and under-resourced government health systems in many African countries create a gap that is filled by CLOs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries in the region implemented lockdowns as a measure to curb the spread of the virus. However, these restrictions resulted in significant challenges for individuals, organizations, and communities. People experienced heightened levels of anxiety, isolation, and a loss of self-confidence. Concerns about food scarcity also rose and there was an escalation in gender-based violence.

These circumstances created physical, psychological, and emotional difficulties for community members. For instance, individuals living with HIV and AIDS faced hurdles in accessing essential supplies of antiretroviral medicines (ARVs) and other medical services due to travel restrictions during the lockdown. Therefore, the demand for CLOs to step up and provide these critical services increased significantly. These community-led initiatives became vital in supporting the affected individuals during these trying times.

Since these organizations were providing what the government considered essential services, their frontline staff continued to work even during the lockdowns. The unprecedented overwhelming demand on GBV and HIV services caused many frontline staff to become emotionally drained and stressed. This, combined with the fear of contracting COVID-19 and consequently infecting their family members, increased the burden of fear and anxiety of staff. Although reference to frontline staff normally applies to paralegals, counsellors, activists, and health workers, even support and management staff experienced similar work-related stressors. It was therefore necessary to establish a multi-pronged approach that would benefit all.

Inadequate funding and a lack of appropriate professional counsellors and therapists to advance this work, led most organizations to put staff well-being on the backburner. It was in response to this gap, that the SLF saw the urgency to respond with financial support for partner organizations and the Samworth Foundation agreed to fund this critical work. This gesture was embraced with gratitude, as shared by one of the SLF partners.



We were asking for this support for some time. So, when SLF approached us with a suggestion for a proposal for funding the staff well-being interventions, we saw it as a chance to do something for the staff who at the time of the COVID lockdown were fearful, tired, and dispirited through handling numerous cases of women being battered.

– Women Against Rape, Botswana

Types of Well-Being Interventions

The CLOs carried out various well-being interventions to mitigate the stressful factors that affected the staff and their family members to bring about mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. The processes presented opportunities for the staff to relax and reflect on the effects of their work on their well-being and help them to rejuvenate through peer-to-peer learning. The approaches used were drawn from the general feminist guiding principles of self-care for caregivers, which involves using collective, creative, and holistic approaches to well-being; acknowledging individuals' way of knowing; understanding their way of coping; developing trust and respect; providing safety; acknowledging peer to peer support and flexibility; nurturing hope through counselling and therapy; sharing testimonies; acknowledging what individuals may not be able to resolve and source for help; and the use of arts for healing, among others⁶. Using personal and group dynamics, participants were helped to identify what brought about their distress, anxiety, and fear, and collectively propose solutions to their situations.

The interventions carried out by the CLOs included purchasing equipment to reduce the staff's vulnerability to COVID-19; provision of staff nutrition support by providing foodstuffs; offering individual and group counselling and therapies; conducting workshops and retreats for staff and family members to share and have time together; and holding staff debrief sessions. These helped them to share experiences and some of the solutions that had worked for them. Some of the organizations used part of the funding to improve the working environment through renovation of workspaces and provision of basic office and kitchen equipment, while others improved on the sanitation facilities for the protection and dignity of their field officers.



Photo Credit: Eva Gilliam, Zimbabwe

⁶ Towards a Transformative, Feminist Approach to Trauma in Africa: Perspectives from Practice, 2022. Arican Institute for Integrated Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls & HIV and AIDS and Stephen Lewis Foundation d Stephen Lewis Foundation

Documenting and Developing Well-Being Policies and Guidelines

The retreat and workshop sessions enabled partner organizations to recognize the importance of institutionalising well-being in the organizations' day to day workplans. This prompted some of the organizations, such as Ripples International, to develop mental health guidelines for staff members who work in crisis situations. RISE took further steps and held a consultative meeting with its stakeholders aimed at developing a Mental Health and Well-being Policy. This process involved holding three needs assessment workshops with community volunteers, adolescents, women living with HIV, and RISE staff. The needs assessment identified issues and situations that trigger or sustain stress, trauma, and depression among these groups. These were used to develop the policy which is guided by a committee that oversees the operation and implementation of the organization's staff well-being work.



Nutrition Support

The 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 crisis affected all families worldwide, but especially the most vulnerable in sub-Saharan Africa, where governments did not have adequate systems and resources to supplement the little that families could afford. The SLF support helped mitigate the effects of the lockdowns and the stress felt by staff who were struggling to feed their families. The CLOs, other than YWCAA and CWCA, supported the nutrition of their staff by directly buying food packages for staff members who were badly in need. YWCAA provided its smaller staff a minimal monthly stipend for eight months, while CWCA took a sustainable approach and used the funding received later in 2022 to train twelve members of staff in growing vegetables and fruits in their home gardens to provide balanced meals for healthy living.



Improving the Working Environment

Through the well-being support, the management of Ripples used the opportunity to establish and equip a lactation room with a refrigerator and other facilities for its present and future lactating mothers to address anxiety when they return to the office after their maternity leave. The organization also refurbished its staff kitchen and equipped it with a gas cooker, a microwave oven, and a toaster, which became very handy during the lockdown for staff to bring their own food from home and prepare meals during break. The organization also enhanced the sanitation facilities for field staff who ride motorbikes down dusty roads, by putting in a change room with a bathroom for their use after field missions before joining other members of staff. This enhanced the dignity of these staff members as they were able to join their peers refreshed and clean. To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 infection Ripples also hired a bus for staff transportation during the COVID-19 lockdown. WAR constructed a private screening room outdoors for clients to create privacy to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures.



Gifting

There is nothing as exciting as receiving a gift of appreciation. This does not only motivate the receiver but also builds one's confidence and brings happiness to both the receiver and the giver. WAR, Musasa, CABDA and YWCAA chose gifting as one of the approaches they used to improve the well-being of their staff. Gifts included personal branding of T-shirts and bucket hats; personalised coffee mugs and T-shirts; and Christmas vouchers so they could choose the gift for themselves and their family members. Other organizations chose to support their staff to clear pressing financial obligations that drastically reduced their anxiety; and some awarded certificates to best performing staff of the year.

Protection Against COVID-19 Infections

The partner organizations procured equipment and other items for handwashing, sanitization of workspaces and staff personal protection. This included establishing handwashing points, and providing soap dispensers, paper towel dispensers, face masks, hand gloves and temperature guns. This equipment was instrumental in reducing both anxiety and the spread of the virus among the staff. The awareness raising sessions that staff shared with communities and their family members about the importance of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination resulted in the staff members, their families and many community members getting vaccinated against COVID-19.



Staff Retreats and Workshops

The management of the nine partner organizations used workshops and staff retreats to demonstrate their appreciation for the staff's steadfast contribution to the organizations' missions, and to help staff manage the vicarious stress and associated trauma that was being experienced while at work and within their families. The duration of the retreats was limited to only one or two days. This, however, did not stop some organizations such as RISE, find ways of including some of the staff's family members in the retreats as a way of addressing possible sources of stress for the staff. The partners identified different themes they felt fitted their particular areas of concern such as, such as Heal the Healers; Stress Management; Recharged to Serve; Importance of Wellness to Individual's Health; Self-Care Training; Managing Stress; Refresh, Refocus, Restart; and Mental Health and Wellness. Services of relevant professionals were employed to tailor and conduct suitable interventions to achieve the intended outcomes.



Staff Psychological Support

Different organizations adopted different innovative practices to sustain their healing processes. During the lockdown for example, while YWCAA and RISE conducted counselling sessions for their staff, these organizations also provided each staff member with a new smart phone and a communications allowance to facilitate the planned counselling sessions. After the lockdown, RISE added debrief sessions and invited motivational speakers to facilitate the processes. CABDA on the other hand, developed an in-house model where, during its sessions, one of its staff members provides spiritual guidance to other staff to support the collective staff well-being. The organization has also consolidated its relationship with an external professional who facilitated the staff well-being retreat as a referral pathway for cases that needed her expertise. She has also continued to encourage staff to support one another as a way of checking on resurgences of stress among each other. This has helped staff to develop a culture of openness with each other that is now being practiced in the organization. The process has supported some staff who had challenges at home to gain confidence and seek help, hence reducing the probability of sinking back into anxiety and stress.



Key Outcomes of Well-Being Interventions

Institutionalizing Well-Being in the Organizations

The supported organizations have consciously made staff well-being a part of their culture and now endeavour to follow management practices that aim to reduce stress for staff. These include encouraging staff to respect individual time boundaries; encouraging them to practice meditation and breathing exercises and take up hobbies; setting goals and prioritizing individual tasks; learning to be kind and compassionate to self; fostering good relationships and connecting with fellow workers; developing good communication skills; learning how to express themselves positively; and keeping their passion and creativity high.

Enhanced COVID-19 Coping Mechanisms

Although the COVID-19 pandemic came with a lot of challenges, the purchase of protective equipment and the awareness-raising carried out through the staff well-being project reduced the staff's anxiety about getting infected and infecting their families. Most members of staff and their families did not acquire COVID and the few who became infected recovered from the disease with few or no complications.



At first, I had been reluctant to get vaccinated but after receiving knowledge on the importance of being vaccinated and eating healthy foods during the wellness training, I went for vaccination...When I got infected, I was no longer scared of dying of Covid and accepted what this meant in my condition... When I returned home, I isolated myself in a room from the rest of the family, which protected my family from getting infected. I also did physical exercises within my room, which I had also learned during one of the well-being training sessions. I was very courageous, answered phone calls and kept other staff informed of my progress. I remained confident, open minded and kept a positive mind...I continued to interact with friends. Having been vaccinated against COVID-19 prevented me from getting serious complications...I am today alive and well....This training was an eye opener, and it did help many of us in different ways."

– a CWCA staff member

Improving Staff Morale and Motivation

It is evident that the diverse approaches to improving staff well-being have not only built the confidence of staff but have served as motivation for every individual to become more intentional about their own well-being. All partners acknowledge that adopting well-being practices by an organization is a good strategy for growing healthy teams of staff, and for effective and efficient delivery of services to the communities they serve. The interventions improved the performance of staff and management as attested to by one supervisor from CABDA who said about a staff member, ***"She is now able to accomplish her assignments on time, her temperament is controlled, she is social, and she effectively contributes to the team."***

The well-being interventions unleashed potential in some individuals that the partner organizations were hitherto not aware of. The SSI staff retreat brought out the creativity of one of the staff members when she excelled at the karaoke singing contest between staff members. She was later asked to record some jingles, which the organization used for its radio campaign messages. This has given her a sense of belonging and connectedness and a feeling of self-worth, and all these have contributed greatly to her well-being.



Photo Credit: DeLovie Kwagala, Botswana

Better Family Relationships

Work-related trauma and stress affect relationships in families too, which brings about behaviour change in the members of staff. The strengthened relationships and interactions between staff and management, due to the well-being interventions, has helped organizations become aware of some discord within families of their staff and take actions to improve family relationships. *“A male member of staff whose spouse was complaining about him neglecting his family members as he spent more time at the office than at home, came to me and explained to me some of the challenges he faced with his spouse and requested for three days off to be with his family, which I granted. My positive response has brought harmony back into this family and the staff member now looks more relaxed than before.”* - the CEO of CABDA

When RISE decided to include family members of staff in the organization’s well-being retreat, it organised a men-to-men interaction, which helped participants recognize that the challenges they were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic were structural and not individual. The conversations extended into collective problem solving, which helped to transform the situations of some families.

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He used to stay indoors most of the time, having stopped associating with any of his friends. This situation was driving us towards mental breakdown. The interactions and psychological support at the retreat induced my husband to interact with other male counterparts attending the retreat. The interactions made my husband regain his self-esteem and resilience, and since his participation in the retreat the environment at home has totally changed. He has gained confidence and now has a positive outlook about life. He started looking for part time work to contribute to the family budget, as he looks for fulltime employment.... He lost his job due to COVID that forced the organization to phase out some positions... The stress at home has reduced, and the family regained its happiness.

– a RISE female staff member

One of the stressors in family relations during the COVID-19 lockdowns was poor access to food, which was caused by several factors, particularly a lack of financial resources to purchase the food. The provision of food packages through the staff well-being project brought some relief to the affected households as shared by one recipient staff.



The provision of these major items brought joy and love in my family that I will never forget in my life. My family received the shopping box and school fees with thanksgiving and gladness for we had no food to eat, and I had large school fees arrears which I had not been able to settle for two years...My children had been sent home, and this traumatized me.....It caused a lot of strife between me and my wife....who wondered why I always went to work but could not provide for the family.. It was the hardest moments I have experienced. It felt like a rock had been taken off my chest.

– a CABDA staff member

The food package CABDA provided for families during crisis times was the icebreaker that connected the organization to the families of its staff. Most families commented that they did not know that CABDA loved them that much, and they now look at the organization as party of their families.

Healthier Lifestyles

The well-being support carried out in these community-led organizations led some staff to adopt daily routines like jogging and meditation in their organizations. The wellness excises have greatly improved the staff physical and mental well-being. The staff who embraced vegetable and fruit gardening acknowledge that this has improved their health, as well as their finances, because they have fruits and vegetables to eat and can sell some to help support their other basic needs.

Improved Communication Skills

All the supported CLOs have demonstrated evidence of improved communication skills among staff, management, and to some extent in families and at the community level. This has resulted in more harmonious relationships at all these levels and reduced stress and anxiety. For example, CABDA indicated that its staff have learned how to better handle situations when dealing with their families and community affairs. Through informed communication, their family members now understand what their spouses are involved in and are now very supportive. The communication skills acquired have indeed improved relationships within organizations which has greatly contributed to increased staff performance and productivity. YWCAA management now ensure that staff receive timely transparent updates to understand management's expectations and know how their performance is benchmarking against set goals. There is a clear recognition among the heads of these organizations that providing staff opportunities to grow through training, motivation, and promotion, makes them feel more confident and competent in their jobs both inside and outside the organization thus, reducing their stress levels.

Ability to Address Stress

Vicarious trauma is an underlying condition that is often not recognised by the affected persons but can lead to the affected person unknowingly experiencing a lot of stress. The condition can, however, be recognised and dealt with by relevant professionals. With the SLF support, some of the CLOs were able to access the professional support they needed. The interventions helped staff recognize that some of their behavior at work was a result of stress caused by vicarious trauma. A CWCA counsellor who attended the organization's debriefing session said, *"I realized that I was on the verge of breaking down due to fatigue and secondary trauma, but the debriefing sessions have helped me with self-care tips that help me to help myself after every session with a client. Now I can pour out from a full cup not an empty cup"*

Arising out of the well-being stress management interventions, CABDA staff were able to adopt better ways to manage stress and trauma. One staff affirmed this, saying, *"The skills we acquired have helped us to recognise and handle stress at all levels and have enabled us to balance personal and work-related interventions."* Talking about staff members who used to have outbursts whenever approached with a problem to solve, a CWCA manager testified, *"This has changed and they now have different attitudes, perceptions and feelings towards work, and feel part and parcel of the organization."*

Ability to Transfer Acquired Skills

Some staff who participated in the well-being interventions have been able to transfer the skills acquired to others. For example, the Ripples field staff have shared what they learned with the organization's volunteers who support orphans in the community. The volunteers are using the knowledge while dealing with their clients. This has created a ripple effect in addressing staff well-being within the organization and beyond.

Challenges Faced

Ineffective Online Counselling: Due to restrictions imposed on travel and meetings involving many people during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the initial individual and group counselling sessions were carried out online. However, because of poor internet connectivity, the process was quite cumbersome, time consuming, and required a lot of internet data. It was not as effective as the in-person counselling sessions conducted once the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.



Sustaining the Impact of Short-Term Well-Being Projects: During the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the partner organizations undertook short-term well-being projects, such as offering food items or stipends to their staff members. Although these initiatives successfully achieved their intended objectives within the project's timeframe, ensuring the continued positive outcomes and benefits after its completion has proven to be challenging. To secure the long-term sustainability of such projects, proactive efforts are necessary to identify ways to preserve their results and impacts over time.



Sustained Funding: The project funding went a long way to kickstart the staff well-being journey of healing. Over the course of the project, what has become apparent is that given the enormity of the staff well-being challenges, funding needs are great. The venues with adequate facilities to host the retreats and skills-building workshops were quite costly. For the CLOs to fit their aspirations of the process within the available resources, some organizations hired cheaper venues without fully appropriate facilities, while others limited the number of staff or family members, even when they acknowledged that they all needed to be part of the process. Professional facilitators were more expensive than anticipated, forcing some of the organizations to leave out this critical component in the well-being process. The organizations also felt that trainings of more than one or two days would have been ideal. Overall, however, this project has been important to the partner organizations and provided management with lessons that they can use to budget for more consolidated well-being interventions and to streamline them into the organizations' development strategies. It will be important for the SLF to reach out to more funders and encourage them to support this critical work.

Lessons Learned

Increased Workload Was the Chief Stressor Among Staff: Whenever organizations stepped up support services among the communities or when GBV cases increased, the demand for services by the public increased. This further, burdened staff and so did their exposure to traumatic cases, leading to increased stress and poor performance at work.



Well-being Interventions Help Staff to Bond: The group interventions and exercises carried out during the wellness and debriefing workshops helped break down the hierarchical barriers between the staff at different levels, making them bond more, and realize that they were pursuing a common goal. This made it easier for staff members to interact and get assistance to resolve issues that would otherwise affect their well-being.



Staff Well-being is Key to Organizational and Staff Development: Staff well-being plays a very significant role in the life of an organization and if not handled well can greatly affect the performance of an organization. The effects of stress and trauma on family relationships also affects staff performance at work and cannot be overlooked.



Vicarious Trauma Affects All Staff in CLOs: During the well-being interventions it was clear that it is not only the frontline staff offering counselling services who get exposed to work-related stressors. Other staff in the organizations come across these same stressors when carrying out their routine work, and more so when receiving feedback from frontline staff and when accompanying them on field trips with minimal preparation for what to expect in the field.



One-Off Well-being Interventions are Less Effective: For some of the staff regular well-being interventions like counselling and debriefing would be more effective and would help ensure the sustainability of any gains made through the process. Training staff as trainers of well-being would be a cost-effective approach to provide ongoing support within the organizations.



Well-Being Interventions Should be Tailored to Meet an Organization's Needs: The approach of letting the organizations identify the staff well-being interventions most appropriate for their environment ensured ownership by the organizations. This made it easier for the organizations to integrate these approaches into their strategic plans and work cultures but will require ongoing financing and technical support.



Staff Well-Being Should be Included in the Organizational Budget: The support for staff well-being should be substantial and should be integrated into the organizational budget to allow for proper planning and implementation. While flexible, unrestricted funding is ideal, where this is not possible, this element of the work could be included in donor funded budgets in the same way that administrative costs are included, recognizing its critical place in ensuring that the work of the organization is effective.

Conclusion

Staff well-being is a vital part of an organization's success and important in the life of each staff member. It requires ongoing commitment, effort, and resourcing to ensure positive well-being in the face of trauma and stress.

With thanks to the Samworth Foundation, the support the SLF provided for staff well-being over the years, puts both foundations ahead of many donors, in showing care and support for caregivers in the most remote and disadvantaged communities in sub-Saharan Africa.



They can now control their mental and emotional well-being happiness is now at the best level compared to before the interventions. This shift in their mental well-being has improved motivation, creativity, collaboration, and loyalty, which even the clients have noticed.

– RISE staff member

This project has shown how investment in staff well-being brings positive benefits to staff and to the organization. It is important for the work that is being done to support the broader community, for the strength of the organization, for the families of staff, and importantly for the staff themselves.



Photo Credit: Eva Gilliam, Zimbabwe

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The report was written by Ruth Ochieng and the photographs included were taken by DeLovie Kwagala and Eva Gilliam.

Championing health and human rights with community-led partners to respond to the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa.



Photo Credit: Eva Gilliam, Zimbabwe

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