

## **CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE 16<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL COUNSELLORS CONFERENCE, 2020**

**CONFERENCE THEME: “ATTAINING A HEALTHY MIND IN A HEALTHY BODY: FOCUS ON FORCED MIGRATION, MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER”**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The inclusion of mental health in the Sustainable Development agenda (UN, 2015) is a sign that the world is paying attention to the current crisis of forced displacement. This is posing serious humanitarian and development challenges across the world, requiring us to focus on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well – being for all at all ages. As host to over 1.3 million refugees (UNICEF, 2019) spread over 15 districts, Uganda must grapple with this challenge. Additionally, Uganda has had its own struggle with conflict and internally displaced persons, and is also affected by human trafficking both within and across its borders. The related socio-economic problems disorganize at varied degrees/levels the mental health of many individuals in the community and society at large and negatively impact their ability to make good choices.

According to WHO (2017), 'Mental Health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his/her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. There are a variety of contributing factors to the onset of mental health issues which include; physical, social, environmental and psychological causes. Everyone has potential to experience mental health issues; however, it is important to note that people with Mental Health problems can get better and even recover completely.

### **Attaining a healthy mind in a healthy body**

Absence of physical pain or illness and feeding on a good diet does not mean that a healthy mind or body has been achieved. Mental and emotional health is more than being free of depression, anxiety and other psychological issues that when not handed tend to lead to mental illness and disorders. This is largely experienced in the forced migrants such as men, women, children, the youth and the elderly.

Attaining a healthy mind and body is also still abstract for host communities that themselves have limited resources that can be easily overwhelmed by refugee influxes that can quickly overwhelm existing capacities including health, social, housing and educational systems and services.

Counselling is a helpful therapeutic method that allows refugees, internally displaced persons to build resilience through the post-traumatic stress issues to better their mental health and improve their well-being.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual conference aims at bringing to the fore Mental Health in the context of forced migration. This has created a crisis for Uganda as destination country for most forced migrants within the great lakes region.

### **Objectives of the Conference**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Counsellors' Conference aims at attaining the following Objectives:

1. To examine the existing mental health and psychosocial practices, models and interventions, that are being used to enhance the well-being of both refugees and hosts in treatment, recovery and building resilience for individuals, families, men, women children and the communities.
2. Provide a forum for all counsellors and those providing counselling services to share experiences and best practices in counseling forced migrants, dealing with Mental Health and Gender challenges.
3. To situate and advocate for counselling as an integral therapy in handling mental health and psychosocial challenges among the forced migrants and the host communities.

### **Expected Outcomes of the Conferences**

After the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Counsellors' Conference, it is expected that the Conference Participants will achieve the following;

1. Shared and documented experiences and best practices to add to their expertise for interventions in their practice on counseling forced migrants in relation to mental health and gender.
2. Gain new knowledge on the emerging mental health issues for the attention of counsellors and practicing professionals in provision of support and care for the society at large.
3. Networking
4. Strengthening of the counselling profession in Uganda.
5. Advocacy for the counselling profession to be prioritized in areas of forced migration and mental health service provision.

### **Scope of the Conference**

The three-day Conference will take place from 25<sup>th</sup> -**27<sup>th</sup> March 2020** at Silver Springs Hotel Bugolobi. The conference will run from 8:30am to 5pm and it will cost **250,000/= Uganda shillings only**. The conference is expected to draw participation of 150 people. The dress code is corporate smart.

Participants will be drawn from counseling professionals, National working team for mental health and psychosocial support in refugee settlements, donors, Government ministries, departments and agencies (MGAs), Civil Society organizations, development partners and all

people that use counseling in their day-to-day work: lawyers, religious leaders, teachers, health personals, police and the army.

The key note will center on the theme,

**“Attaining a healthy mind in a healthy body, focus on: Forced Migration, Mental Health and Gender”**

A call for abstracts will be sent out inviting partners in implementing intervention on mental health and psychosocial support in refugee settlements, professional practitioners and service providers plus the general public to write and make presentations on the following sub-themes.

**Sub themes:**

- Models that work in the context of forced migration.
- Psychosocial challenges for hosts and refugees.
- Mental health and support for children.
- Gender and Mental health
- Human trafficking and the export of labor
- Caring for the carer

The conference will be highly participatory with a lot of opportunity for networking that will contribute to immensely to the growth of the counselling profession in the society.