



Society for Pre and Post Natal Services

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**1<sup>st</sup> TWO-WEEKLY REPORT ON SPANS COVID-19 COMMUNITY FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH  
RESPONSE PROGRAMME IN THE GOROMONZI DISTRICT OF MASHONALAND EAST  
PROVINCE OF ZIMBABWE**





## Acknowledgements

The greatest appreciation goes to Ember for funding this Mobile Community Family Mental awareness and to our line Ministry of Health and Child Care for the unwavering technical and moral support they have always given to all the programmes and initiatives that SPANS comes up with, including this SPANS Mobile Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Response which was necessitated by the incidence of the devastating global Covid-19 pandemic. Much support was forthcoming from the Secretary for Health and Child Care, the Deputy Director for Mental Health, Dr. Chirisa, and also from Mrs. Siyame in the formulation and facilitation of the necessary bureaucratic communications necessary for the finalization and approval of the programme.

Our gratitude is extended to the Environmental Health Department whose Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) in Goromonzi District gave invaluable assistance in pinpointing and guiding the Response Team to the hotspots in their areas of coverage and were part of the Covid-19 Community Mental Health Awareness Response Team.

Great appreciation is also extended to the Home Affairs Ministry's ZRP Operations Department who managed to assign some Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) Officers from their Police Stations in Goromonzi District to form part of the Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Response Team, which officers by virtue of their nature of work proved very essential in the dissemination of the mental health messages to the community and helped highlight some of the presenting issues which they deal with in their day-to-day interactions with the Goromonzi communities.

Last but not least, the rolling out of this programme would not have been possible without the benevolent assistance of the funding partners who supported SPANS to bring the initiative to fruition, much to the benefit of the Goromonzi District communities.

### **Objectives of the programme**

The SPANS Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness programme was designed and initiated with the following objectives;

- To disseminate accurate educative information to the Goromonzi communities on the prevention and control of Covid-19 infection;
- To raise mental health awareness and help address the mental health issues associated with and emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- To assist the communities on the mental health issues they are experiencing in the face of the obtaining Covid-19 situation;
- To try and take Covid-19 mental health education to some of the remote communities within Goromonzi District who otherwise have limited access to such information and
- To help clarify the relation and distinction between mental health issues and mental illness.
- To use a multidisciplinary approach involving Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) and ZRP Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) officers together with SPANS personnel in these awareness outreaches as these two departments are also involved in observation of preventive hygienic practices and mental health issues resolution respectively.

### **Background**

It has been reliably noted by the SPANS Team members in their interactions with society that there is a widespread misunderstanding among the general public about the difference between **“Mental Health”** and **“Mental illness,”** a misunderstanding which the outreach team sought to clarify and provide accurate information in all the communities reached and also over all communications made through all media.



## Preparatory Activities

Following the approval of this SPANS programme for the Community Family Mental Health Response, the Programmes Team Leader made every effort to make sure all protocols are observed and all relevant stakeholders are appraised. The Provincial Medical Director (PMD) and the District Medical Officer (DMO) were notified and their approval secured. The office of the District Development Coordinator (DDC) was informed and she was furnished with all the relevant documentation, together with the District Police Chief who was engaged through the Police Internal Security Intelligence (PISI). Details from the areas' ZRP Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) were assigned to accompany the SPANS Team. The Ruwa Local Board Health Promotion Officer and the Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) in the proposed areas of operation were informed of the dates the programme would reach their areas as they would accompany the Awareness Outreach Team.

A minibus was chartered for ferrying the Awareness Team members on their outreach campaigns and it was branded with SPANS banners prepared specially for the mental health awareness programme. Identifying bibs were also prepared for all team members for them to be easily distinguishable during the course of duty in the community.

The Itinerary for the initial phase of the Programme was prepared and communicated to all relevant offices, that is, to the PMD, the DMO, the DDC, the relevant Police Stations and to the EHTs, with the DMO assisting in drafting the itinerary to cover some of the generally remote communities. The support of the local Primary Health Care Clinics and the ZRP Base camps was also sought and successfully secured.

## The Community Awareness Response Activities carried out to date

### Summary of communities reached and the total estimates of people reached

| Date       | District  | Locations/ Communities Reached | Total Estimations of people reached per community |
|------------|-----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 10/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Ruwa                           | 1 050                                             |
| 12/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Damofalls                      | 1 700                                             |
| 14/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Caledonia                      | 2 420                                             |
| 18/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Cranborne/ Timire & Banks Farm | 575                                               |
| 21/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Melfort                        | 880                                               |
| 25/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Goromonzi Business Centre      | 1 720                                             |
| 27/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Rusike                         | 480                                               |
| 29/05/2020 | Goromonzi | Juru Business Centre & Bosha   | 1 715                                             |

So, in all, a total of about **10 450 people** were **reached directly** through this first phase of the SPANS Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Response.

Considering the attention the campaigns received in the communities the Team went out into, another estimated **5 000 people** were also **reached indirectly** through the information ripple-effect.

The first Awareness Response outing was on Sunday 10 May 2020 which covered Ruwa urban, covering Ruwa residential area and Zimre Park. The Team addressed people at the main shopping centres and then broadcast the Mental Health messages as the outreach vehicle went up and down the residential streets in order to reach out to as many people as possible even



while they were in their homes. In total, an estimated 1 050 people were reached on this first day.



The Tuesday 12 May 2020 outreach covered a part of Ruwa residential, also targeting two busy water points (boreholes) and three relatively busy shopping centres where human traffic was a bit heavy. The Team then proceeded to Damofalls residential area and traversed some residential streets heralding the three-pronged messages; in the Team were a detail from the ZRP Victim-Friendly Unit and an Environmental Health Technician, which two are included in every one of the outreaches. In Damofalls, targeted were some two busy shopping centres where the team members took time to also interact with the patrons and shoppers in order to try and gather some of the mental health issues which the community is faced with due to this Covid-19 pandemic, an exercise which was very enlightening and informative. The Team even took the opportunity to address some mourners who were gathered at a funeral. On this day an estimated 1 700 people were reached.

On Thursday, 14 May the Team ventured into the Calidonia urban settlement where they targeted some busy shopping centres and also traversed residential streets publishing the mental health messages. In one-on-one interactions, the team also picked some of their mental health issues, which were noted for reference in the public messages so that they try and address the presenting issues. The outreach covered Phases 1, 2, 4 and 6 of Calidonia, although it is evident the area is too wide to be satisfactorily covered thoroughly. All in all, in Calidonia an estimated 2 450 people were reached.



On Friday 15 May was the date of the first weekly review meeting with all stakeholders who participated in the outings. Discussed in the meeting were items like lessons learnt within this past week's excursions and also areas where strategies can be improved. The proceedings of the meeting were documented and filed.

On Monday 18 May 2020 an excursion was made into the Timire residential area outside Ruwa accompanied by the Area EHT and a detail from the Ruwa ZRP Victim Friendly Unit (VFU). The team also visited the nearby Banks Farm. In Timire the Team stopped at the one shopping centre where human presence was very sparse but managed to engage and address the shop-attendants and the few patrons and customers who were present. They then traversed the residential streets, broadcasting the Covid-19 family mental health mobile education awareness promotion messages. All in all in Timire we reached out to an approximate 450 people.

The Team then crossed over into Banks Farm, a vegetable and horticultural farm where they engaged most of the farm workers while they were at their various work spaces. At the farm the team managed to pick a few issues which the residents and workers had, namely insufficient preventive sanitisers and face masks, although almost all the workers had a mixture

of standard, home-made and improvised face masks, a notable sign of their appreciation of the risk they face of infection. At the farm they reached out to an estimated 125 people, which when added to the 450 they reached out to in Timire, comes up to a total of about 575 people reached on the day.



On Thursday 21 May 2020 the Response Team went for an awareness campaign in the Melfort area. The shopping centre at Melfort was not very busy as patrons and customers appeared to be taking heed of the preventive recommendation to stay indoors. The Goromonzi Police paid a reconnaissance Lockdown enforcement visit while the SPANS team were there, enforcing the recommended operation of shops and dispersing any people who had no essential business there, and this indeed resonated with the preventive message we were also broadcasting urging people to stay at home. The team then traversed the streets in the residential area of Melfort sending out mental health education messages while the area EHT and the ZRP detail sent corresponding messages urging constructive dialogue in the event of any friction arising in the home.

After going through the Melfort residential area they then visited some outlying farms in the vicinity where they addressed the farm workers during their lunch break. Noted was the



widespread wearing of face masks on the farms, which is a positive step in fighting the spread of the Covid-19 virus infections. However, from a mental health perspective, besides the restriction in travelling to distant places, the farming communities' lives were not very much affected by the Lockdown measures and they received the mental health messages eagerly as the messages spoke to some of the domestic violence and sexual assault incidences which the team gathered to be on the increase in the area from the police base. Because of the distances to be traversed between the farms the team was not able to access many of the farms because Melfort is mainly a farming community. They therefore managed to reach out to an estimated 880 people by the end of the day, which was a reasonable figure considering that the area is not densely populated.

On Monday 25 May 2020 the Covid-19 Family Mental Health Response programme took off for Goromonzi Business Center. They picked the ZRP VFU officer and the Area EHT. Their first port of call was the shopping center where there was a noticeably heavy presence of people because of the fuel queue at the only Service Station. They provided mental health education to the motorists and shoppers present and picked quite a few noteworthy issues from discussions with them. They then went around the shopping centre reaching out to the shop-owners. They then went around the residential streets and even grasped an opportunity to address and interact with some residents who were gathered at a water borehole. They also visited the nearby Chinyika Clinic and shops where there was very little human presence. They however spoke to the shop attendants there and received some very informative responses.



They learnt that many residents in the Goromonzi Business Center were adversely affected by the initial Total Lockdown but many were now productively engaged and were going to their workplaces because of the relaxation to Level 2 Lockdown measures. They observed widespread use of face masks in public and therefore continued emphasising this together with social distancing and washing of hands. The team also learnt of the worrying incidence of Domestic Violence and sexual assault cases, some of which were never reported to the Police.

On Wednesday the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, the SPANS COVID – 19 Community Family Mental Health Response Team travelled to Goromonzi with the objective of disseminating information on the importance of maintaining a sound mind during the lockdown and adhering to social and health preventative guidelines provided by both the government and the World Health Organization (WHO) in relation to the COVID – 19 virus. The team comprised three members from SPANS who included the driver, three Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) and an officer from Goromonzi Police Station's Victim Friendly Unit (VFU).

The first port of call was Nora Shopping Centre. The team used a hailer to transmit their messages to the target population while maintaining social distancing. The shopping centre had an estimated 23 patrons present, while the hailer carried the messages to the nearby homesteads. The team then proceeded to Rusike Clinic where two of the three EHTs joined. The Response Team spoke to about 16 people who were at the clinic. Kandengwa Shopping centre was the next location to be visited. There was minimal economic activity at the centre, hence the team addressed the 12 people present, but the hailed messages also reached those who were in the neighboring homes. The team then travelled to Nziramasanga Shopping Centre and observed only 6 people at the shops. The hailer carried the broadcast messages to some nearby homes.

The final location to be visited was Rusike Shopping Centre where there was an estimated 135 patrons at the shopping centre. The most concerning observation made by the Response Team at Rusike Shopping Centre was that almost all of the patrons did not have face masks and were hardly observing social distancing despite the preventative guidelines that were being shared by the EHTs. By the end of the day, including those who got the messages while in their homes, an estimated 470 were reached by the Response Team.

Then on Friday 29 June the team made an excursion to Juru Growth Point and Bosha area under Chief Chikwaka. The first port of call was Juru Business Center where the team picked a VFU detail from the Police Station and went on to address and engage the patrons who were at the shopping centre. Being a relatively busy highway centre, about 350 people received the messages at the shops. It was noted that almost all the patrons at Juru had face masks on and

some shops had sanitisers at their shop entrances. The Team then went on to broadcast messages to the residents of the homesteads along the road out of Juru, as they proceeded towards Bosha, thereby reaching out to about 800 residents.



Upon picking two EHTs from Bosha Clinic, the team grabbed the opportunity to first engage the few Village Health Workers who had come to the clinic for some updating on preventative measures to encourage in their communities. From there, while addressing the about 30 patrons who were at Bosha shops, the Team noted with great concern how practically not a single one of them had a face mask on and went on to give health education on the importance of wearing face masks and observing all the accompanying safe hygienic practices.

The Team then went along the roads through the villages publishing the awareness messages to the homesteads lining the roadside. They went on to Dzvete shops where the about 25 patrons present also had no face masks at all. Prompted by the worrying spike in escapes from Returnees' Quarantine Centres and the accompanying incidence of positive cases among returnees, the SPANS Response Team emphasized to the villagers the need to alert their local



leadership, Village Health Workers, EHTs and the local Police upon noting any returnees within their communities so that investigations be carried out to establish whether they would have undergone all the recommended and prescribed isolation, screening and testing processes.

All in all, in the Friday 29 May Juru and Bosha awareness outreach an estimated 1 700 people were reached by the SPANS Covid-19 Response Team.

### **Key observations noted through the programme**

- The widespread mistaken interchangeable use of **“mental illness”** and **“mental health”** by the general populace seems to make most people think mental health practitioners deal with the mentally ill only. As a result most potential clients fail to open up about their issues for fear of being stigmatized as being on the verge of mental illness. More mental health awareness education is therefore vital in order to promote the use of these health services without fear of stigma; From personal interaction with members of the communities visited, quite a considerable number of issues were picked. Notable among these are;
  - Scarcity of food on most household tables,
  - The unfounded fear of the unknown,
  - Uninformed fear of infection,
  - Fear of the possible annihilation of whole families/clans/villages/nations by the pandemic,
  - Unfounded myths surrounding the Covid-19 virus and its control,
  - Failure to comprehend the importance of precautionary guidelines for prevention,
  - Increased incidence of Domestic Violence cases due to the unfamiliarity of spouses spending 24/7 together because of the Lockdown,
  - Increase in cases of sexual abuse of minors due to prolonged enclosure in homes,
  - Friction amongst family members through prolonged time being together,
  - Economic incapacitation due to interference of lockdown on profitable economic engagement,
  - Apprehension of what life will be like after the pandemic, having lost jobs, relations, sources of income, etc
  - Strained marital relationships due to the economic incapacitation,
  - Lack of accurate information on the virus and its effects,

- Rampant abuse of alcohol and drugs due to absence of productive economic activity and
- Frustrations with the inhibited freedom of movement and social gathering.

So in the mental health awareness messages SPANS endeavored to address some of these presenting issues, though they couldn't adequately address all of them because of time limitations.

- Among most of the urban and peri-urban communities reached, the team noted that there appeared to be religious observance and adherence to the prescribed guidelines of the wearing of face masks in public places. It was pleasing to notice how most people had their face masks on (both standard quality and home-made) whether at shopping centres or on the roads;
- Most of the shop owners encountered appeared to be observing the recommendation to have their shop-attendants putting on face masks and having sanitizing facilities at the entrances. The conspicuous presence of Enforcement officers at most busy shopping centres seemed to be contributing to the widespread use of masks and sanitisers;

### **Noted causes for concern**

During this first phase of the Awareness Response exercise, the SPANS team made the following observations which are indeed a cause for national societal worry;

- Limited dissemination of accurate information to remote communities,
- The skeptical approach to preventive hygienic guidelines by some communities,
- Hazardous negligence of the use of face masks in remote communities combined with no observance of social distancing,
- Notable laxity of Enforcement efforts in the remote and outlying communities,
- People's only wearing face masks for fear of arrest rather than for prevention of infection and
- The worrisome unforeseen spike in numbers of infections in the last few days of the programme.

### **Recommendations**

Having conducted these minimal awareness excursions, albeit to only a fraction of the Goromonzi communities, SPANS therefore has the following few recommendations to make to the National Covid-19 Task Force which could greatly help in Infection Prevention and Control;

- There is definitely great need for increased mental health awareness promotion throughout Goromonzi District, particularly in the outlying communities;
- There is greater urgent need for enforcement activities in remote communities;
- There is great need for sensitization of the general public on the importance of maintaining stable and sound mental health all the time, especially in the face of a global pandemic of the magnitude of the novel Covid-19;
- There is need for deployment of professional mental health personnel in all Primary Health Care facilities so that these services are accessible to the whole community;
- There is great need for generation of relevant mental health Information Education Communication for distribution to all communities to promote greater awareness;
- If more players could be sensitized so they can come on board there would be increased awareness on Covid-19 Infection Prevention and Control;
- There needs to be developed reliable networking amongst Civil Society Organisations to join hands and make concerted efforts in fighting the spread of the Covid-19 virus infections.

## **Conclusion**

On realizing the great need for awareness within the communities in the District, SPANS is tirelessly engaged in sourcing more funding partners in preparation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Covid-19 Community Mental Health Response Programme and hopes to be able to reach out to many of the remote communities.

It is therefore SPANS's hope and request that if possible, the Ministry of Health and Child Care link us with and recommend us to other potential partners within their network as this will go a long way in helping achieve SPANS's desire to reach out to as many communities as possible with this Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness programme.