

Advocacy toolkit case studies

RAISING AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH IN AFGHANISTAN

THEME:**Health****ADVOCACY APPROACHES:****Building relationships
Educating community members
Government officials: meeting with
Using the media**

In Afghanistan, people suffering with mental health illnesses are largely left untreated as there are very few relevantly trained professionals within the stretched and limited health care system. Sufferers are mostly disregarded due to a lack of knowledge and resources. Families sometimes turn to traditional faith healers, who do not always provide appropriate help. The many Afghans with mental health problems are consequently one of the most vulnerable groups in society. One Tearfund partner, seeing the great need, decided to advocate for greater attention to the problem following years of treating patients and training local health professionals and workers in the western region of the country.

Working with the provincial health director, the public health directorates, education directorates, health care professionals and other NGOs concerned about the issue, the partner raised awareness about mental health through basic training courses and special events. This included engaging with the media. As a result of the partner's requests, the media broadcast television programmes at a national level to raise awareness about mental health.

The partner also worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Health in developing a national mental health training manual for medical professionals working in primary health care. They also worked with some key higher education institutions to develop a mental health curriculum for nurses.

It is important to develop relationships with national and international journalists in our context and country, even when we do not want anything from them. If we tell them about our organisation and the communities with which we work, we are opening the door so that we can ask them to tell our stories and share our messages when appropriate opportunities arise. We can also find out what they are interested in.