



The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness

Social Connectedness Fellowship Application

Research Project #8 - Friendship Bench

The Social Connectedness Fellowship provides students and recent graduates with the opportunity to carry out research, writing, analysis, and outreach related to overcoming social isolation and building social connectedness. Fellows are paired with partner organizations that work to build belonging and social inclusion across a variety of thematic areas—climate change, disability and older people’s rights, refugee integration, inclusive education, placemaking and urban design, and much more.

Project Details:

Partner: The [Friendship Bench](#) provides evidence based psychological therapy delivered by trained community grandmothers (lay health workers) from wooden park benches. The Friendship Bench’s mission is to create safe spaces and a sense of belonging in communities, to enhance mental wellbeing and improve people’s quality of life. The organization operates primarily in Zimbabwe, and has expanded to Zanzibar, Kenya and Malawi.

Location of Fellow: Remote (please note this is only open to MSc students from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and King’s College London)

Project Description:

Interested in exploring the power of community to address mental health challenges?

Background: In addition to one-on-one sessions with a Community Health Worker, clients are invited to join a [Circle Kubatana Tose](#) (CKT). CKTs are peer led groups that provide clients with ongoing support. A circle is a safe space for



people to come and share how they are coping with life or how they feel when they aren't coping with life. While we have academic studies demonstrating the overall effectiveness of the Friendship Bench's approach, little research has focused solely on examining the impact of the CKTs on people's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

A Fellow will undertake a qualitative research project on the CKTs. The analysis will be based on 12 in-depth semi structured interviews of women/men who have utilized the Friendship bench CKT group support program in the last 4 years. The Fellow will design the interview guide with support from an appointed Friendship Bench research assistant based in Harare (where requested). The interviews should focus on the journey of the group members, what their experience of being part of the CKT and what they have gained if anything.

Two research assistants (RA) trained in qualitative methods will carry out in-depth interviews with 12 selected participants over a 2-week period using the interview guide developed by the Fellow. Interviews will be audio-recorded then translated/transcribed into English. English transcripts will be sent to the Fellow who will analyze the findings and produce a report which will eventually be formatted for submission for peer review in an international scientific journal.

To develop a better understanding of the work of the Friendship Bench, the Fellow will also have the opportunity to interview key team members of the Friendship Bench over zoom.

Key Deliverables:

1. 2 blog articles
2. Community engagement initiative with local staff and clients in Zimbabwe
3. Report on the experience of Zimbabwean women utilizing the Friendship Bench CKT over a 4-year period
4. A draft manuscript ready for pre-submission to a peer reviewed journal



Key Skills/Competencies Required:

- Must be an MSc student from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine or King's College London.
- Basic knowledge of global mental health principles.
- Good knowledge of qualitative research methodologies in health/epidemiology.
- Excellent organizational skills & ability to effectively document, organize & categorize research, i.e. using excel or other software.
- Strong initiative, time management and project management skills to plan and lead an international research project.
- Use of Nvivo software for qualitative methods is an asset.

How to Apply:

All applicants must fill out the [Google Form application](#) by March 7, 2021 at 11:59 pm EST. Applicants can apply for 1 or 2 projects. In addition to answering the standardized questions, applicants must also answer a specific question or two for each project that they are interested in. Specific questions for Research Project #8 - Friendship Bench:

1. Please describe your previous knowledge and experience in qualitative research, and any experience related to global health. (Max 200 words)
2. What role does community play in strengthening wellbeing and mental health? (Max 200 words)