

# CONSOLIDATING ACT TRAINING IN UGANDA

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## Introduction /Overview

- ACT was introduced in Uganda by Dr. Ross White in 2014 through a workshop with mental health providers. The majority were in training institutions like Makerere University, mental health hospitals and organizations in Uganda.
- Mindfulness has been introduced to some Ugandans. Mindfulness is a state of awareness, focus and openness. This allows one to engage fully in what one is doing at any one moment. In this state, difficult thoughts and feelings have a lower impact and influence over one's life.
- The ACT model promotes this and has applicability to mental health issues and trauma, in addition to increasing athletic or business performance. As such it appears to have relevance to the Ugandan context.
- Hence usefulness for all states that is from full-blown psychiatric illness to increasing athletic or business performance.

## Aims

- To expose ACT as a therapy to all mental health practitioners in Uganda through workshops and trainings so as to maximize human potential for a rich, full and meaningful life.
- We also aim to have ACT widely incorporated into therapy sessions by mental health providers.
- Finally we are also focused at having ACT as part of the under and postgraduate curriculum.

## ACT workshops and Trainings

A number of training events have been organized with the aim of developing ACT in Uganda.



The above is the very first ACT workshop in Uganda held in August 2014 conducted by Dr. Ross White from University of Glasgow and Commit and Act (See Photo above). It had 70 participants including University faculty, postgraduate students, clinicians and NGO staff held in a Lecture theatre at the Department of Pharmacy, Makerere University.

## Session coverage;

- Commit and Act work and what people face in Sierra Leone.
- Rationale for the ACT approach
- Understanding of Psychological flexibility
- Focus on being present, being open and doing what matters
- Involved experiential exercises and rehearsal of particular techniques.

## Other trainings /workshops since 2014

- A stress reduction workshop was carried out by Cerdic Hall, a nurse consultant working for the UK National Health Service, in March 2015 with mental health nurses and students.
- A skills training with masters students at school of psychology by Taslim Tharani, an Organizational psychologist especially based on how to incorporate ACT in the workplace.
- An ACT workshop in July 2016 by Ann involving theory discussions, learning approaches, destructive normality and pain being a natural part of human life.



The above photo is of a three-day introductory ACT workshop in October 2015 by Igor Krnetic, PhD, an Assistant Professor at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina and a certified trainer in CBT. It involved postgraduate students of psychology and psy



The photo above was of ACT training with Dr. Joe Oliver from London and participants in the two day Introduction to ACT and the Intermediate Skills workshops.

- The Intermediate skills workshop had trainees who were currently using ACT in their practice.
- They work with children, adolescents, people recovering from trauma and psychosis.
- Dr. Joe spent time with the Butabika Recovery College and Peer supporters group which is a set of projects supported by the Butabika-East London Link initiated in 2003.
- Dr. Joe Oliver and Racheal Nuwagaba conducted a stress and Resilience workshops with a group of nurses based in Butabika hospital.

## Special Interest Group

- A Special Interest Group was started by Dr. Rosco Kasujja.

## Results

Based on feedback from participants in the workshops and trainings;

- Many trainees have embraced ACT because the basic concept of Psychological flexibility resonates with most practitioners and clients to promote a rich, full and meaningful life.
- Mindfulness which is central to the use of ACT has proven acceptable to most clients who find meditation offensive.
- The Caritas team which is engaged in psychotherapy work in Lira, a northern remote city in Uganda, trained by Dr. Ross used the skills acquired in their effort to boost capacity for psychosocial interventions.
- Elizabeth Amongi-a psychology lecturer in Lira used the skills for herself and outreach work to rural communities to support the physical and mental health needs of women challenged with gender based violence..
- Students trained acquired knowledge and experience of the basic ACT and RFT processes. They liked them and were eager to start applying ACT during and within sessions as part of their daily work and lives.
- Trainees also adapted the model to fit with local needs and understanding.

## Discussion and Way forward

- ACT has registered acceptability by the mental health providers in Uganda. The Special Interest group led by Dr. Kasujja is working to consolidate ACT training in Uganda.
- ACT as a therapy resonates greatly with Ugandan communities.
- Father Kalemera is working with Dr. Kasujja to have ACT for the nuns in the convents through individual and group therapy sessions.
- Build ACT work in the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF).
- SIG to mobilize organizations for further trainings.
- More Introductory, Intermediary and Advanced trainings to be held in pairs by the Special Interest Group in Institutions and organizations.
- Lira trainings in collaboration with Commit and Act.
- Branding of ACT work in Uganda so as to bring formality to it and be recognised by ACBS e.g. Commit and Act-Uganda or ACT-Ugandan chapter.
- Focus is to train 1000 people in Uganda in ACT that is to cover all regions and training undergraduates in ACT to use it in communities. SIG to apply for membership with ACBS.
- SIG members to access ACT materials especially for adolescents i.e. DNA model by Louis Hayes and build an organizing committee with different tasks for SIG members.
- Have ACT in university curriculums.
- Find supervision for all SIG members. Attending of ACBS conferences.

## Conclusion

- ACT is a useful and acceptable model for the Ugandan communities.
- ACT work in Uganda will continue growing as the SIG members are gaining grounding.