

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cape Mental Health: a century of care – from disability to ability

Today, South Africa's oldest mental health organisation, **Cape Mental Health (CMH)** officially launched its Centenary celebrations with a loud call for support to enable the organisation to continue improving the lives of adults and children affected by mental illness and intellectual disability.

"We have been providing mental health services to poorly resourced communities in the Western Cape for the past 100 years, and we are very proud of what we've achieved ... but so much more remains to be done," said Ingrid Daniels, who has been Director of the award-winning non-profit organisation since 2000.

Daniels says this is not the time for the organisation to rest on its laurels, "Four in a hundred South Africans live with intellectual disability, and one in five will experience mental health problems or illness at some point in their lives. Many simply do not have access to any services, and this hinders their recovery and growth."

"We are committed to providing the very best mental health care that funding allows. As we head into our second century of work in the Western Cape, we are driven by a mission to reach those where services do not exist, particularly in rural communities, to challenge discriminatory practices and make mental health a reality for all."

Mental illness and neurological conditions contribute to the third highest burden of disease in South Africa. Mental disorders are a leading cause of disability, and loss of economic productivity. They are linked to other health conditions and it is people in poor and disadvantaged communities who are usually most affected.

Cape Mental Health started out in 1913 as the **South African Society for the Care of the Feeble-minded**, by a small committee of concerned individuals. It quickly grew and was influential in the development of South Africa's first Mental Health Act (1916). The organisation prides itself on being a founder member of both the **SA Federation for Mental Health** (1920) and the **World Federation for Mental Health** (1948).

Today **CMH** helps more than 15,000 people a year with 22 community-based projects in the greater Cape Town area, including four Special Care and Education Centres for children with profound intellectual and physical disabilities, four training workshops for adults with intellectual disability, a network of 25 psychosocial community support groups and a psychosocial work skills rehabilitation day centre for adults with psychiatric disabilities (Fountain House SA), two residential care homes, and advocacy groups run by consumers of mental health services. Services include assessment, referrals, counselling and support, skills training, rehabilitation and work opportunities.

Lage Vitus, former National Executive Director of the SA Federation for Mental Health (1968 to 2002) says it has been a remarkable century of progress that has seen a complete shift in attitudes towards the treatment of mental illness and disability. "When **CMH** started in the early twentieth century, there were simply no community mental health services and people with intellectual disability were written off as un-trainable 'cretins' or 'imbeciles'. The Government was not providing any services beyond the white community."

Some highlights from a century of service:

(Heading) A Right to Education for All

In the early days CMH focused on institutional care for children with intellectual disability, but in the 1980s changed the approach to providing care and education for each child to develop to her full potential. Today more than 180 learners at CMH's three **Special Care and Education Centres** (Heideveld, Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain) benefit from a programme designed to meet each child's specific needs. This is achieved with assessment, a personal education plan, consistent implementation and monitoring.

CMH lobbied Government for years to provide schools for learners with special educational needs. CMH was a catalyst for the development of **Mary Harding Centre, Blouville LSEN School** in Retreat and **K1 School for Learners with Special Educational Needs** in Khayelitsha (2001). CMH initiated the **Right to Education Campaign** that culminated in a 2010 High Court ruling that the State was violating the rights of children with mental disabilities by not providing basic education.

(Heading) Protective Workshops to Open Labour Market

When it opened the first of its protective workshops in Retreat in 1980, CMH's intention was to provide a community-based programme where adults with intellectual disability could be occupied and safe. Today CMH's four **Training Workshops Unlimited (TWU)**, in Athlone, Khayelitsha, Mitchell's Plain and Retreat, have personalised training and career paths for more than 600 trainees from surrounding communities, and provide practical skills training to equip them to do meaningful work, within TWU or in the community. Trainees function at various levels and are developed to reach their fullest potential. In May 2007 CMH established the **Siyakwazi Integration Company**, a contract cleaning, gardening and maintenance business where trainees transition to open labour market experience.

Fountain House (SA), CMH's community-based psychosocial rehabilitation centre in Observatory, has been providing skills development and vocational training to adults with psychiatric disabilities since 1986 and currently reaches about 245 adults annually.

Both these projects have been recognised by the Government and by the SA Federation for Mental Health as innovative and best-practice models of transformation, making employment a possibility for people who would once have been written off as unemployable.

(Heading) From incarceration to advocacy

Over the years CMH has pioneered self-advocacy for people with psychiatric disabilities and intellectual disability. In 1999 the **Cape Consumer Advocacy Body (CCAB)** was formed, the first self-advocacy group for people with psychiatric disabilities. From the year 2000, TWU has been implementing the 'We can speak for ourselves' Empowerment Programme across its various services. In August 2008 Gwendoline Daniels became the first person with intellectual disability to be elected by her peers as their representative on CMH's Board. She has served loyally, along with Oscar January, CCAB's Chairperson and CMH Board member (representative of consumers with psychiatric disability).

(Heading) From the streets to the High Court

When CMH started in 1913, the motivation was to prevent young women with intellectual disability being exploited and dragged into prostitution. Since then the organisation has continued to fight fervently for the rights of women and vulnerable people. CMH's multiple award-winning **Sexual Abuse Victim Empowerment (SAVE)** programme (started in 1991) provides psychometric assessment, court preparation, case planning and assistance through the court process for victims with intellectual disability. SAVE achieves a 28.1% conviction rate, surpassing the 25% for the general population.

(Heading) From Disability to Ability

"In 2012 we adopted the slogan 'all about ability' to reflect our belief in identifying and nurturing ability, no matter how modest, and in seeing possibility where some may only see challenges and obstacles," said Ingrid Daniels. "This is our commitment and mission going forward. Having witnessed such phenomenal change over the years, we know we are on the right track and appeal to people to help us make a real difference."

(Heading) How to Help

State subsidies cover less than half CMH's annual budget of more than R20 million. To contribute to the Centenary Fund and help improve mental health services in the Western Cape, email sandra@cmhs.co.za or donate via EFT – details on www.capementalhealth.co.za. All donations are eligible for a Tax Exempt Certificate.

For more details on Cape Mental Health, visit www.capementalhealth.co.za or contact them on 021 447 9040 / info@cmhs.co.za.

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Issued on behalf of Cape Mental Health by On Course Communication.
For media queries contact Cathy Williams on (021) 782 0877 / 084 682 2847 / Info@OnCourseCommunication.co.za.