

International Policy Brief

Topics: Movement for Global Mental Health, DFID, and Parliament

Issue 1, June 2008

Introduction

This is the first BasicNeeds international policy brief. The briefs are designed to communicate policy-related activities, positions and results. Chris Underhill, Founder Director of BasicNeeds, is mostly driving our international policy work with the support of the whole of the BasicNeeds programme management staff and, in particular, our Policy and Practice Directorate and Victoria de Menil. The current issue covers three topics: the Movement for Global Mental Health, advocacy with DFID, and advocacy in Parliament around the MDGs.

1. Movement for Global Mental Health

The Lancet series on global mental health, launched in September 2007, called for the creation of a Movement for Global Mental Health. One of the key roles of the movement is to advocate around the evidence presented in the Lancet series. In December 2007, Chris was asked to lead the advocacy of the Movement. His first move, in consultation with Vikram Patel and Helen Herrman, two colleagues in the Movement, was to expand the Global Mental Health Advisory Board so as to include a more representative group of users and women. Chris then surveyed the 56 member Advisory Board in March as to the content of the advocacy strategy. The results of the survey were analysed and distributed in early May and suggest that advocacy will focus on three areas:

- *Services* – Scale-up health and social services for people with mental disorders in the community
- *Human Rights* – Fulfil the human rights of persons with mental disorders by building user groups and raising awareness about physical abuse and discrimination
- *Funding* – Raise new and significant funds with which to achieve the first two goals.

The next step will be to develop a plan of action and to consult this to the Advisory Group and then present the results on 26 August at the International Mental Health Conference hosted by the Institute of Psychiatry in London.

2. DFID Advocacy

Since 2003, the Civil Society Challenge Fund within the UK Department for International Development has committed £2.7 million to the work of BasicNeeds in five developing countries: Sri Lanka, Uganda, Laos, Ghana, and Kenya. The income from DFID represents 21% of BasicNeeds' total income since inception. DFID is therefore a crucial target of advocacy by BasicNeeds. Our recent advocacy efforts have been to call for DFID to take more seriously the issue of global mental health.

As a result of a letter sent from Chris on behalf of BasicNeeds to the Secretary of State for International Development, on 28 April, Chris met with **Stewart Tyson**, Head of Profession for Health, in the Human Development Team of DFID's Policy and Research Division. In the meeting, Stewart Tyson agreed to host an in-house DFID seminar on "what's new and what works in global mental health." We would like to see this as a contribution to the efforts being made by the Movement for Global Mental Health. Dr

Tyson agreed to meet with Chris towards the end of 2008 to be briefed on the progress to date.

3. Parliamentary Advocacy around the MDGs

The eight millennium development goals (MDGs) have been guiding global health and development investment priorities since 2000.

As a result of an intervention by Lord Sandwhich, an important debate was held on the progress of the health-related MDGs. The health-related MDGs are: reducing child mortality by 2/3rds (goal 4), reducing maternal mortality by 3/4 (goal 5), and halting the spread of HIV and malaria. Chris was able to brief two members of the House of Lords, Lord Sandwhich and Lord Joffe, on the importance of mental health in achieving the MDGs.

The briefs were in view of a Parliamentary debate on 1 May addressing the UK's progress towards meeting the three health-related goals. Lord Joffe gave a speech in which he said the following:

“It is essential to recognise that without addressing mental health the three health-target-related MDGs will not be achievable. ... I would urge DfID to take account of this in the application of its funds to meet the MDGs, and also applaud it for its support of BasicNeeds, a UK charity which does such fine work on mental health in the developing world.”

Full transcript of the speech is available upon request from Victoria.demenil@basicneeds.org.