



The Speaking Book was developed to enable low-literacy communities to receive vital healthcare messages

Destigmatising and treating mental illness

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group: emerging business, small business or non-listed company finalist

David Jackson

Celebrating 12 years of mental health and advocacy this year, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag) is Africa's largest and most recognised mental health initiative.

Noteworthy among the accolades it has achieved was a substantial grant from the World Bank Development Marketplace in 2003. This enabled Sadag to expand its rural development programme, bringing hope to thousands of rural South Africans affected by mental health problems.

Sadag chairperson Zane Wilson also helped Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana to establish their own advocacy groups. And she has worked with major pharmaceutical companies for the past 12 years to remove the stigma from mental illness and to educate communities that depression is a real and treatable illness.

Subsequently, GlaxoSmithKline,

Pfizer, Eli Lilly and Aventis have funded rural workshops for home-based care workers in several provinces. Sadag today supports more than 40 000 patients, has more than 180 support groups and has a scientific and advisory board of 17 professionals.

Sadag says the barriers to improving healthcare for mental health patients are enormous. "There is always a battle to get funds for rural communities to access mental healthcare and often the infrastructure doesn't even exist."

Free and confidential telephonic counselling is a fundamental part of Sadag's work, backed by an intensive media campaign to destigmatise mental illness.

One of Wilson's most significant innovations is the Speaking Book, developed to enable low-literacy communities to receive vital healthcare messages. Launched in 2005, these books are considered essential to primary healthcare education.

