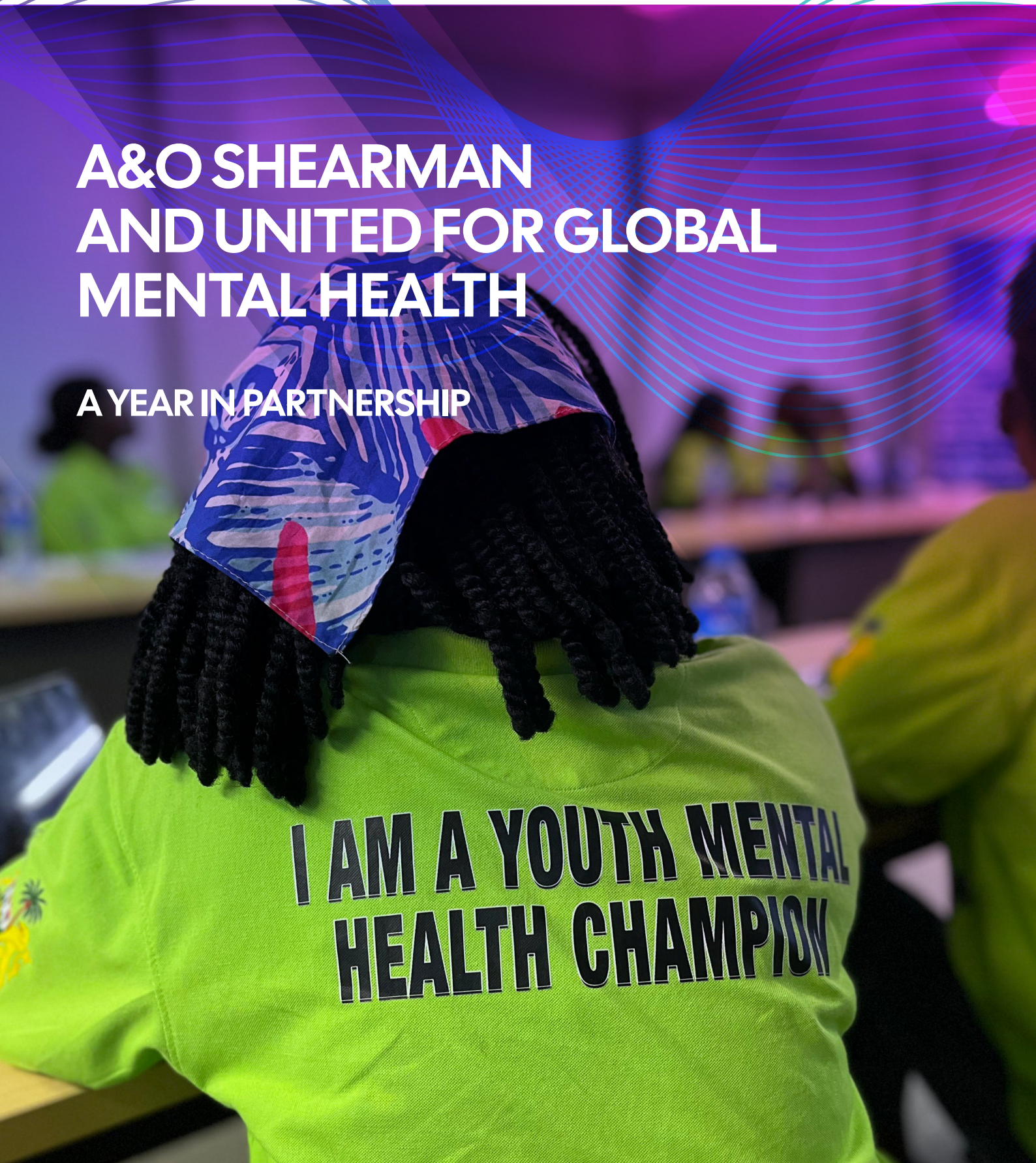
UNITED FOR GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH

A&O SHEARMAN AND UNITED FOR GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH

A YEAR IN PARTNERSHIP





FOREWORD

One year on from the launch of the partnership between A&O Shearman and United for Global Mental Health, the direction and impact of what we are building together is already clear.

Over the past 12 months, colleagues from across A&O Shearman have contributed to better mental health in ways both big and small. For example, 30 A&O Shearman lawyers have been conducting pro bono research that will help change how countries treat people in a mental health crisis, and hundreds have taken part in fundraising, including First Hour First Day. Employees have volunteered their time to mentor LGBTQIA+ young people in South Africa and Zimbabwe; and in October, a team of over 20 people will run the Amsterdam Half Marathon to raise vital funds for UnitedGMH’s work.

These very different activities share a common thread: commitment, generosity and a belief that mental health deserves global attention.

The activities have produced extraordinary results. A&O Shearman employees have raised more than $885,000 for UnitedGMH, and for our four national partners focused on children and young people’s mental health. In the Philippines, this has enabled volunteer-led #MentalHealthPH to hire its first staff members. In Nigeria and Ghana, it is helping SameSame expand digital mental health support for LGBTQIA+ young people facing stigma and isolation. For us at UnitedGMH, it means we can keep connecting advocates worldwide, keep mental health on the agenda at global political moments, and launch our new campaign, Care Not Custody.

This partnership is global, ambitious and deeply aligned. It is rare to see a law firm engage so fully with mental health – not only through fundraising, but through pro bono work, volunteering and advocacy.

Thank you to everyone at A&O Shearman who has invited us to your events, given your time, or contributed financially. We are proud to say that together we have built something meaningful, with lasting impact.

James Sale
Interim CEO
United for Global Mental Health

A&O SHEARMAN'S GLOBAL SUPPORT

Whether you've been raising vital funds, offering pro bono legal expertise or sharing your skills – we're so grateful for your support.

1,089
Pro bono hours logged

$885k
Raised

FUNDRAISING

Since our last update in March, we've seen a huge variety of fundraising across A&O Shearman offices.

You and your colleagues have now donated an amazing $885,000. Thank you so much!

We had fantastic donations from an A&O Shearman Fantasy Football League in London, an office furniture sale with a generous matched donation in Singapore, and the Amsterdam and London summer parties - to name just a few activities.

Your incredible fundraising has enabled us to donate $80,000 to each national partner so far – turn to page 17 to read about what this is helping them achieve.



Raffle fundraising at the London summer party



An International Women's Day activity in Hong Kong

PRO BONO: ENDING HARMFUL MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITALS



An estimated 8.4 million people are admitted to mental hospitals across the world every year.[1] In these institutions, many suffer neglect, abuse and appalling living conditions.

Here at UnitedGMH, we're working to end institutionalisation. We want people with mental health conditions to receive community-based care, which is more effective, respects their dignity, and prioritises their recovery.

We have 30 A&O Shearman lawyers worldwide on the case. Working pro bono, they are reviewing mental health law and policy to explore how current laws can lead to human rights violations, and where there are real opportunities to advance reform.

Since our March 2026 partnership impact report, the team has completed country profiles for 13 countries.



1 Source: United for Global Mental Health, 2025

These country profiles have revealed some key themes:

- Most countries have mental health laws, but few protect against involuntary treatment, coercive practices and human rights abuses.
- Very few countries have mechanisms to support decision-making for people being admitted into institutions.
- Most mental health laws include a human rights section but have limited mechanisms to enforce it.

Next, we'll launch regional reports, with A&O Shearman leading three of them.
This will be a huge moment for us at United for Global Mental Health as we draw attention to this key pillar of our work, and we wouldn't be there without the support of A&O Shearman. We would like to thank all of the lawyers who have given their time to this project, in particular the project leads Sandra Smits and Danae Wheeler, and partner sponsor Karl Pires.

See page 10 for more on our new deinstitutionalisation campaign 'Care Not Custody' – another key component of this work.

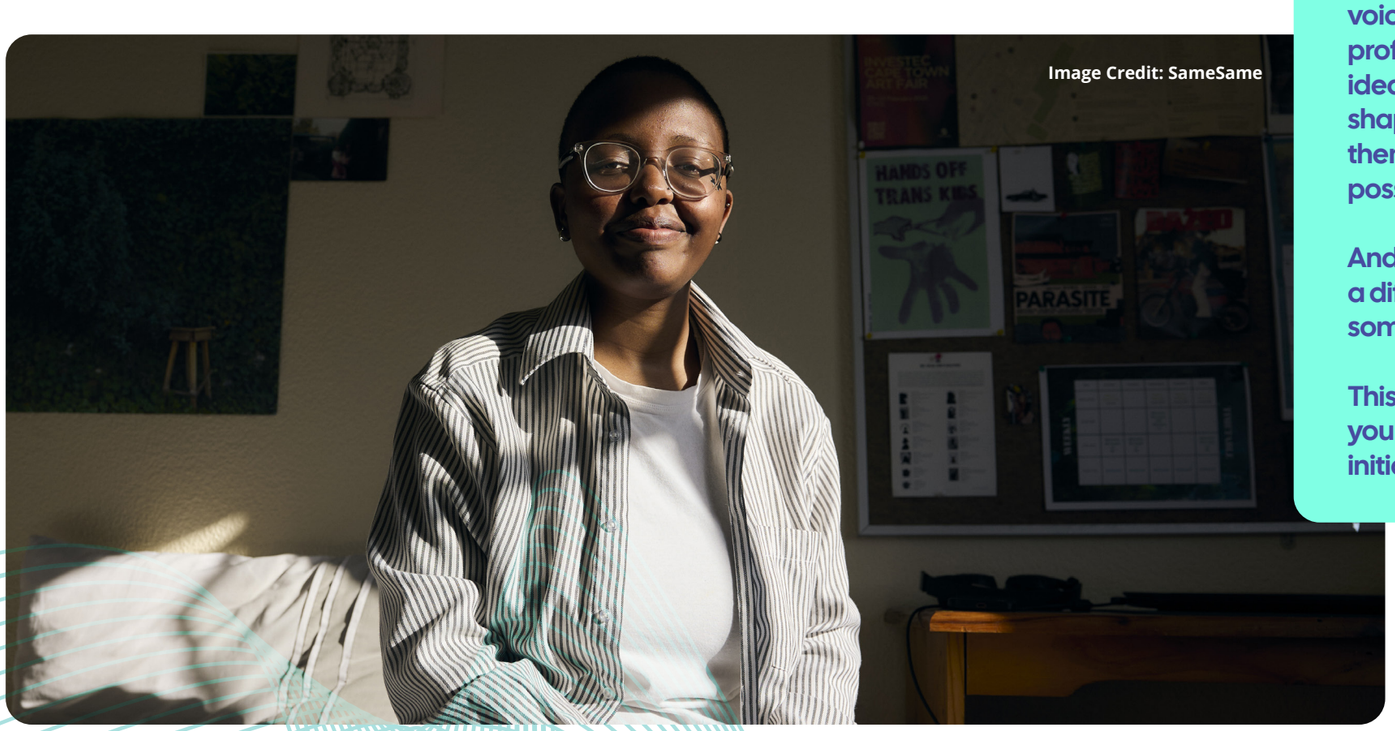


Image Credit: SameSame

SKILLS SHARING

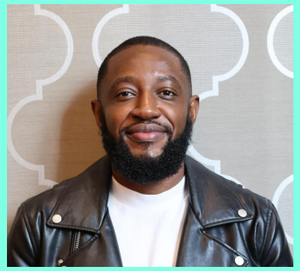
Mentoring for SameSame's young board members

SameSame – one of the national partners you help us support – has a board made up of young people based across Zimbabwe and South Africa. They advise on SameSame's work and ensure it stays relevant to young people.

A&O Shearman's Social Impact team has partnered up with SameSame to create a three-month mentorship programme for the youth board's members.

Trevor Ncube, SameSame's **Strategic Programs Manager**, explains the difference A&O Shearman's mentoring will make to the board's young people:

"The chance to be mentored by A&O Shearman colleagues is an invaluable opportunity for our youth board. For a young person still finding their voice and place in the world, learning from a professional in London or New York, having their ideas heard, and receiving guidance can be a life-shaping experience that changes how they see themselves and expands their sense of what is possible.



Trevor Ncube, SameSame's Strategic Programs Manager

And perhaps the mentor gains something too: a different perspective drawn from the lived insight of a young person somewhere in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, or Johannesburg, South Africa.

This unlikely crossing of two worlds can spark a wealth of possibilities for our young people, and we are grateful to the A&O Shearman colleagues for this initiative."

Pro bono guidance for the network

Together with the A&O Shearman Pro Bono team, we have developed a guide for grassroots organisations worldwide on how to access pro bono legal support in their regions. This work grew out of the extremely positive response to A&O Shearman's session on pro bono support at the 2026 Advocacy Forum.

The guide outlines the different types of support available, how to find it, and how it works in practice. It will be available online to our 10,000 Global Mental Health Action Network members and will launch by the end of 2026. We hope it will be a key resource for grassroots mental health organisations seeking the legal support they need to push their work forward.

Fuse

We are really excited to be the first charity partner cohort member of Fuse. So far, we've had the opportunity to refine our elevator pitch alongside other cohort members, present it to more than 150 colleagues across A&O Shearman offices, and begin mapping how we can streamline our data management with the support of the Fuse team. A huge thank you to everyone at Fuse for championing us and volunteering your time; your expertise is already helping us strengthen how we work.



From left - Brian Heyworth (CEO of Lansdowne Partners), Sarah Kline (UnitedGMH CEO), Shruti Ajitsaria (Head of Fuse at A&O Shearman), John Flint (Group CEO of HSBC) at a dinner hosted by A&O Shearman focused on wellbeing at work

WHAT YOUR SUPPORT MAKES POSSIBLE

The power of unrestricted funding



UnitedGMH's Aviwe Funani with a team of advocates working in Ghana

Through our partnership, A&O Shearman provides unrestricted funding to UnitedGMH which directly supports our advocacy work. We also support four national partners who work on children and young people's mental health.

Advocacy is at the heart of how real change happens in mental health, but it is not always easy to quantify. Much of it happens long before the headlines, in the quiet corridors of major global gatherings, where leaders meet, and decisions begin to take shape.

Sometimes it's a quick conversation between sessions; sometimes it's a meeting that has taken a year to secure. These moments, whether opportunistic or carefully planned, are where influence is built and where long-term change starts.

The **unrestricted funding** your support provides lets us do that well. It gives us the flexibility to show up where mental health needs a voice, and to help elevate the voices of people with lived experience who are too often excluded from the rooms where decisions are made.

We couldn't do this without partners like A&O Shearman who are committed to good mental health and trust us to use the money they raise where it will have the greatest impact. This flexible, unrestricted support is what makes our advocacy work – and progress in global mental health – possible.

Here are some highlights of what unrestricted funding has helped us achieve so far in 2026.







CARE NOT CUSTODY LAUNCH

People with severe mental health conditions die 10 to 20 years earlier than the general population, often due to the neglect of their physical health in healthcare settings.[2]

In May, we launched our Care Not Custody campaign at the World Health Assembly.

OVER 8.4 MILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE ARE ADMITTED TO MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITALS EACH YEAR, where coercive and restrictive practices are often common – including seclusion, restraint using straps, belts and cage beds, and being involuntarily subdued with medication.[3]

In many low- and middle-income countries, more than 60% of mental health budgets are directed towards these hospitals rather than community services that are more effective, respect people's dignity and help them remain part of their community.[4]

As part of our Care Not Custody campaign, UnitedGMH is calling for governments to prioritise:

- community support rather than isolation in hospital
- autonomy and dignity, over isolation and stigma – we want people to have a say in the care they receive
- recovery over restraint – we oppose the use of physical restraints in mental health care.

During our launch event, government representatives from Brazil, Portugal, Egypt and Pakistan gave statements about the importance of reforming mental health institutions – a brilliant first step towards change in those countries.

We hope the campaign will inspire local advocates to make the case for community-based care rather than institutionalisation. **The reports A&O Shearman is producing through our pro bono project will give them the tools they need to make this argument.**

In addition to your pro bono support, your unrestricted funding has allowed us to launch the campaign and plan for long-term engagement around this key issue.



Shayni Geffen (UnitedGMH), Tiwa Ayeni (Lived Experience Advocate) and Divya Sharma (UnitedGMH) at the World Health Assembly

2 Source: World Health Organization, 2018
3 Source: United for Global Mental Health, 2025
4 Source: World Health Organization, Mental Health Action Plan 2013 - 2030



Image from Credit: Sushanta Rokka

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE

UnitedGMH has made protecting mental health amid intensifying climate change a priority. We're pushing governments and global institutions to embed mental health care into climate action plans.

- **Policy integration:** We published step-by-step guides to help countries integrate mental health into national climate plans. As a result, countries from Uganda to Malaysia are actively using these guides to shape their climate strategies.
- **Global measurement and accountability:** We lead the push to track access to mental health support for climate-affected communities globally.
- **Overcoming resistance from several nations,** our targeted, evidence-based advocacy helped convince all 197 signatories of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to adopt a dedicated mental health indicator in a framework to measure global climate adaptation. Because what gets measured gets prioritised, this breakthrough ensures governments can now be held accountable for protecting community mental health during climate crises.



BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THE CONVERSATION

Youth advocates enter Pakistan's mental health policy process

UnitedGMH led workshops across three Pakistani provinces to train local youth leaders on how government policy works. By building strong relationships with the Ministry of Health, the team secured official spots for six young advocates – two from each province – to join the national mental health policy consultations.

This marks the first time young people in Pakistan have been officially at the decision-making table to help shape national health strategy. Instead of being left on the sidelines, these youth leaders used their personal experiences to write direct recommendations for Pakistan's next 10-year mental health plan.



UnitedGMH's Ali Hasnain delivers advocacy training in Pakistan

UPSKILLING FUTURE ADVOCATES

Empowering young people to bring their experiences and opinions to those shaping mental health policy is vital. Our advocacy training model has become a global public good, and demand for it is growing.

It covers core skills including:

- **Policy literacy** – how national, regional and global mental health policies are shaped
- **Power mapping** – identifying who influences decisions and how to reach them
- **Storytelling for advocacy** – using lived experience safely and strategically
- **Campaign planning** – setting objectives, tactics and timelines

So far in 2026, we have delivered **nine advocacy-training programmes**, reaching more than 136 young advocates and people working for youth-focused organisations.

By training people around the world to advocate effectively to local, national, and global policymakers, we give them the tools to drive change. This work wouldn't be possible without the unrestricted funding of partners like A&O Shearman, who trust us and allow us to lead in this vital area.



UnitedGMH's Shayni Geffen with a team of young advocates in Sierra Leone



The UnitedGMH team delivering advocacy training in South Africa

GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH ACTION NETWORK - SPARKING NEW COLLABORATIONS



The UnitedGMH team delivering advocacy training in South Africa

Our Advocacy Forum is the largest gathering of mental health advocates in the world. In February we convened over 350 representatives from 75 countries at the Forum, including representatives from A&O Shearman offices.

We judge the Forum's success by what leaves the room and keeps moving: the collaborations, the funding opportunities pursued, the policies shifted and the knowledge carried home.

Our post-event survey found 130 new collaborations, 36 fundraising actions taken, and seven countries already setting policy change in motion.

Read our full event impact report here





Attendees of the 2026 Advocacy Forum

OUR NATIONAL PARTNERS SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AROUND THE WORLD

A&O Shearman's donations have:

3,891
NEW CHATBOT USERS

Supported SameSame's WhatsApp chatbot service, with 3,891 new users since September 2025

250
SCHOOL CHILDREN

Given 250 school children across Romania the opportunity to take part in InIm's wellbeing sessions

158
YOUNG VOICES

Brought the perspectives of 158 children and young people in Brazil to advocacy planning for the national elections, coordinated by Vertentes

5000+
YOUNG PEOPLE

Enabled #MentalHealthPH to build relationships with seven schools across Manila, which will reach over 5,000 young people with its mental health training

SAMESAME COLLECTIVE: SUPPORTING LGBTQIA+ YOUTH ACROSS AFRICA

"People in my hall started calling me names – 'trumu boy', 'woman-man'. A lecturer even joked about it in front of the class. I stopped going to events and avoided group work because I didn't want more attention. I felt sick all the time. My grades dropped, but I was too scared to ask for help. If I told someone why, I'd just make it worse."
Kwame, 21, a queer student in Accra, now supported by SameSame

Digital mental health platform SameSame Collective operates across South Africa and Zimbabwe, providing vital mental health support to LGBTQIA+ young people.

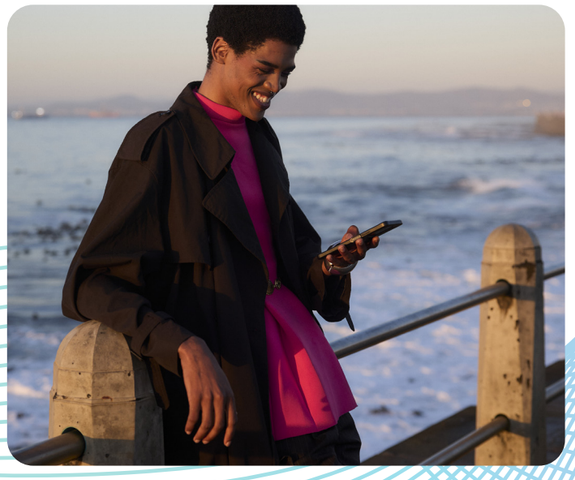
With A&O Shearman's support, SameSame has:

- Expanded its work to Ghana, launching in September 2026. More than 40% of young people in Ghana are affected by bullying[5], with over half of the 100 students surveyed by SameSame saying bullying on campus is a 'huge problem'. SameSame is partnering with universities across Ghana to share tools that equip young people to recognise and report bullying. It's aiming to connect with more than 15,000 students in the academic year.
- Developed three new digital products focusing on problems that damage young people's mental health, but rarely get counted as mental health problems – heartbreak, religious shame and anxiety over money. So far, these new products have reached more than 500,000 young people across five countries.

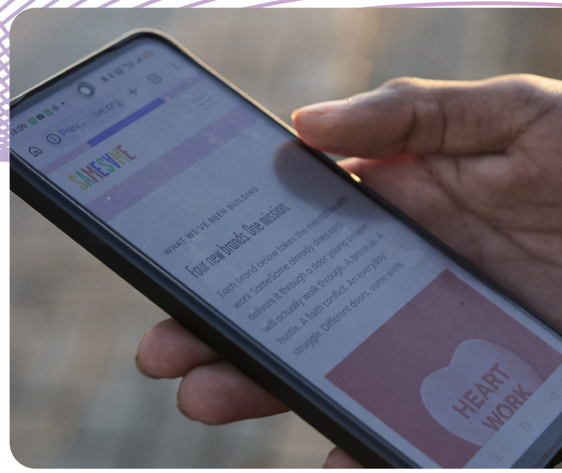
"I've gained my self-esteem back, and I'm more self-assertive than before. I'm able to control my anger and say how I feel in a way that doesn't hurt the other person... I'm hoping to completely accept myself..."
Chatbot user Buhle, aged 18, lesbian. Lives in Mpumulanga, South Africa

"A&O Shearman's support has given us breathing room during a very uncertain time for organisations doing work like ours. It has helped us continue supporting LGBTIQ+ young people in the face of dramatic cuts in funding and increasingly discriminatory legal regimes. Instead of worrying about whether we can keep the work going, we can focus on making it better for the young people who currently rely on it and expanding to new places where our services are even more necessary." Trevor Ncube, Strategic Projects Manager









5 Source: University of Agder

INIM INSTITUTE: ACROSS SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA

InIm Institute is a mental health organisation in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, focusing on mental health training for teachers and students.

With A&O Shearman's funding, since May 2026, InIm Institute has:

- Hosted a roundtable for the Romanian Senate on young people's mental health, attended by 150 people including the Minister of Education and the President of the Senate. Young people at the event brought their experiences to the conversation with national decision-makers.
- Delivered six mental health sessions at different schools in the Cluj-Napoca area. These sessions cover activities including using an 'emotion wheel' to name and map feelings, and role-playing social situations with peers.
- Run a week-long Wellbeing Camp for 35 students, providing workshops on belonging, emotional regulation and bullying.
- Held national Mental Health Week in Romania, including a competition to find the schools with the best mental health activities. The two winning schools were awarded around US$880 to set up wellbeing areas.

"I had a great time because I met so many new friends, but I also learned a lot about mental health. The camp helped me understand how important it is to talk about our feelings, support each other and not be afraid to ask for help when we need it." InIm Wellbeing Camp attendee







#MENTALHEALTHPH : THE PHILIPPINES

#MentalHealthPH is a national movement in the Philippines that raises awareness of mental health problems and reduces stigma. A&O Shearman's donations have been transformative for the organisation.

With your funding, it has:

- Hired three full-time staff members – a Program Manager, Finance and Operations Officer, and Communications Officer. A huge win for the previously volunteer-led organisation.
- Set up The Circle of Care initiative with medical and mental health professionals specialising in adolescent development. The initiative, which supports both students and their primary support systems, aims to reach 8,000 students and 3,000 parents, with sessions starting in September 2026.
- Celebrated their 10th anniversary by opening the doors to their first office space! This will enable them to host wellness events for their community, and work more efficiently and collaboratively as an organisation.



"Through A&O Shearman's generosity, we now have more than a project – we have our office (finally, a physical space!). Having this dedicated home, along with the time to listen deeply to the stories of our youth, allows us to cultivate truly safe spaces where young people feel genuinely seen, heard and valued." Marie Concepcion Felipe, Program Manager



Marie – Program Manager
Marie previously volunteered for six years and has now stepped into the full-time role managing A&O Shearman's programme. She has 12 years' experience working in education and brings this to the school project in particular.



Shaira – Communications Officer
Shaira leads on #MentalHealthPH's visual media creation – designing everything from self-care cards to the charity's new video podcast series.



Fiona – Finance and Operations Officer
Fiona brings vital experience in finance, compliance and administrative support.

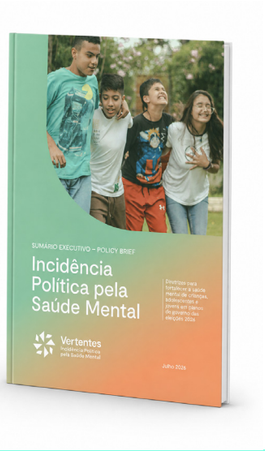
VERTENTES: A VITAL ELECTION YEAR IN BRAZIL

Vertentes is the only national movement in Brazil dedicated to changing the mental health system.

At the end of 2026, Brazil will elect new state and national representatives, and Vertentes wants to see mental health commitments that support the 72 million children and young people living across Brazil.

A&O Shearman's funding has enabled Vertentes to:

- Hire a team working on the election campaign, including an advocacy specialist.
- Develop a Policy Pack that makes the case for prioritising the mental health of children and young people on the Brazilian government's agenda. The pack includes a comprehensive research study, policy brief and a commitment letter to engage with candidates.
- Conduct research across 158 young people to understand what mental health challenges they face and what support.





Dayana Morais, Advocacy Specialist at Vertentes, handing the Policy Pack to Eduardo Brandão, President of the Green Party of the Federal District



Dayana Morais, Advocacy Specialist at Vertentes, and Joyce Trindade - pre-candidate for State Representative of Rio de Janeiro

"We are deeply grateful for A&O Shearman's support, which has enabled us to turn young people's voices and evidence into a concrete political advocacy agenda, develop and disseminate the Policy Pack, and engage candidates in prioritising the mental health of children, adolescents and young people in Brazil." Fátima Viscarra, Executive Manager, Vertentes

32%

When it came to the climate crisis, 32% of participants reported experiencing negative emotions, such as fear, sadness, anger, or hopelessness, frequently or all the time, highlighting the growing relevance of climate anxiety among adolescents and young people.

45%

Said they avoid seeking help for mental health concerns because they believe they need to deal with their problems on their own.

Key findings from Vertentes' research

43%

Said they were unaware of mental health programmes and initiatives aimed at adolescents and young people in the country.

9%

Said they never feel bad when using the internet or social media.

23%

Had already turned to artificial intelligence tools to seek some form of mental health support or guidance.

In 2027, we look forward to sharing updates on:

they need

- **SameSame's expansion to Nigeria**
- **InIm Institute's publication of a national study on youth mental health**
- **#MentalHealthPH's programme launch in schools in Manila**
- **The number of mental health commitments Vertentes secures from political candidates in Brazil**



WHAT'S NEXT?

We have lots of exciting plans in the works for the partnership as we head into 2027, and you can be part of them.

10th OCTOBER
WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY.
Visit our LinkedIn page to share our content online and join the conversation.

OCTOBER We'll be taking a team of senior leaders at A&O Shearman on a visit to our partner, InIm Institute.

18th OCTOBER A Team of more than 20 runners take on the Amsterdam Half Marathon. If you're based in Amsterdam, please cheer on your colleagues, and donate to their fundraising pages!

DECEMBER First Hour, First Day, A&O Shearman's flagship fundraising event is coming around again. We would love to beat the incredible $650k we raised last year. Every dollar donated will help shape the future of mental health. Please sign up and share with your colleagues!

FESTIVE FUNDRAISING
As we approach Christmas, we'll share fundraising ideas with our partnership ambassadors. If you aren't an ambassador already, you can join by scanning the QR code below.

May 2027

We have a team of runners taking part in the Hackney Half in London. Please contact our partnership manager Megan if you are interested in running, and support your colleagues taking part!

If you are in another office and have a suggestion for an event you would like us to secure spaces for, please get in touch with Megan, our partnership manager.

THANK YOU

We hope that you are as blown away by all our incredible achievements from year one as we are at UnitedGMH. We can't thank everyone at A&O Shearman enough for your support, and we look forward to all the future holds for our partnership.

Contact:
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UNITED FOR GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH

@UnitedGMH