

GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH  
WEBINAR SERIES:

# CRITICAL, CULTURAL, AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

## The Friendship Bench: A community-based mental health innovation

### ABSTRACT

The Friendship Bench is a task-shifted low-threshold psychological intervention offered in Zimbabwe's primary health care clinics. A recent cluster randomized controlled trial showed that the Friendship Bench can successfully bridge the treatment gap. The intervention is delivered by trained and supervised lay health workers who see their clients on a bench in the community's clinic. The Friendship Bench intervention consists of up to 6 sessions of problem-solving therapy and the participation in a peer-led support group that also focuses on income-generating. The Friendship Bench has been rigorously tested through a cluster RCT (JAMA 2016) and scaled up to over 70 communities in Zimbabwe (Global Mental Health 2016). The intervention has reached more than 50,000 people and the model has been successfully introduced to other countries. As the model goes to scale, critical questions include what key features of the interventions are critical to ensure universality of the approach and how will fidelity be maintained as thousands of people are trained to deliver the model in different cultural settings.

### MODERATOR

#### Mónica Ruiz-Casares

PhD, MSc, MA, LLB  
Associate Professor  
Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry  
McGill University



### SPEAKER

**Dr. Ruth Verhey** is a clinical psychologist, works as psychotherapist and is part of the Friendship Bench (FB) management team. She is the co-developer of the intervention and Co-PI on all FB research projects. Dr. Verhey holds a PhD in Psychiatry from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. Her research focuses on easily accessible and affordable care for common mental disorders, community-based interventions, group support, the well-being of counsellors as well as PTSD in people who live with HIV. Originally from Germany, she has lived in Colombia and has been working in Zimbabwe since 2004. She is an Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) consultant and runs a private practice.

**January 15, 2020 9:00-10:00am (ET)**

**Attendance:** <https://event.voiceboxer.com/event/llwgmf/login>  
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