



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**Youth Excel**  
Our Knowledge, Leading Change



## MINDSKILLZ MAGAZINE ZAMBIA PHASE 1 - EVALUATION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developed by [Grassroot Soccer \(GRS\)](#), the MindSKILLZ Magazine is a simple, take-home resource that aims to fill a critical gap in mental health education and engage young people's families in positive mental health promotion. From April - October 2022, with the support of the global [USAID Youth Excel project](#) and partner [IREX](#), GRS distributed 2,344 print MindSKILLZ Magazines to youth living with HIV (YLHIV) in Zambia and evaluated the effectiveness and relevance of the Magazine to promote mental well-being.

The mixed-methods evaluation found that the Magazine was:

- **Effective in promoting the mental well-being of adolescent participants** — where the biggest positive changes were seen in Magazine recipients' positive self-concept and willingness to share mental health information.
- **Acceptable and relevant to young people and adult stakeholders** — 93% of participants sampled (n=269) viewed the Magazine as a good tool for positive mental health promotion, and many were willing to share what they learned about mental health with family members and friends.

Five international experts additionally conducted a thorough technical review of the Magazine, highlighting its **interactiveness, positive and strengths-based language, and youth-friendly and relatable approach** as positive attributes, while also providing suggestions for improvement.

Overall, the MindSKILLZ Magazine appears to be a promising supplementary tool for reinforcement of mental health concepts and discussions among young people and their families. Findings from the evaluation and feedback from the expert review will inform GRS's revisions to the Magazine content and delivery methods, and contribute to the body of evidence on community-based mental health interventions and resources.



## BACKGROUND

Youth living with HIV (YLHIV) experience high rates of mental health challenges, with about 1 in 4 experiencing depression.<sup>1</sup> In Zambia, mental health services are minimal — and completely absent in many communities — leaving an urgent need to respond to these challenges.

In response to this need, Grassroot Soccer (GRS) developed the print MindSKILLZ Magazine: a fun, comic book-style resource to promote mental well-being of YLHIV. The Magazine includes youth-friendly mental health content, soccer-based activities, and relatable images, including lived experiences from GRS Coaches (young adult mentors who serve as role models to whom youth can relate). The project included the development, design, and evaluation of the MindSKILLZ Magazine in Chipata and Lusaka, Zambia in 2022.



(Left to right) MindSKILLZ Magazine cover, 'Stay in Control' example activity, and 'Take 5' poster insert

## EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted from July to December 2022, with the aim of establishing the effectiveness of the Magazine, its relevance to participants and stakeholders, and participants' engagement with the written content in the Magazine. GRS engaged 44 Coaches to distribute the Magazines door-to-door to 2,344 YLHIV and conduct follow-up home visits.

## CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

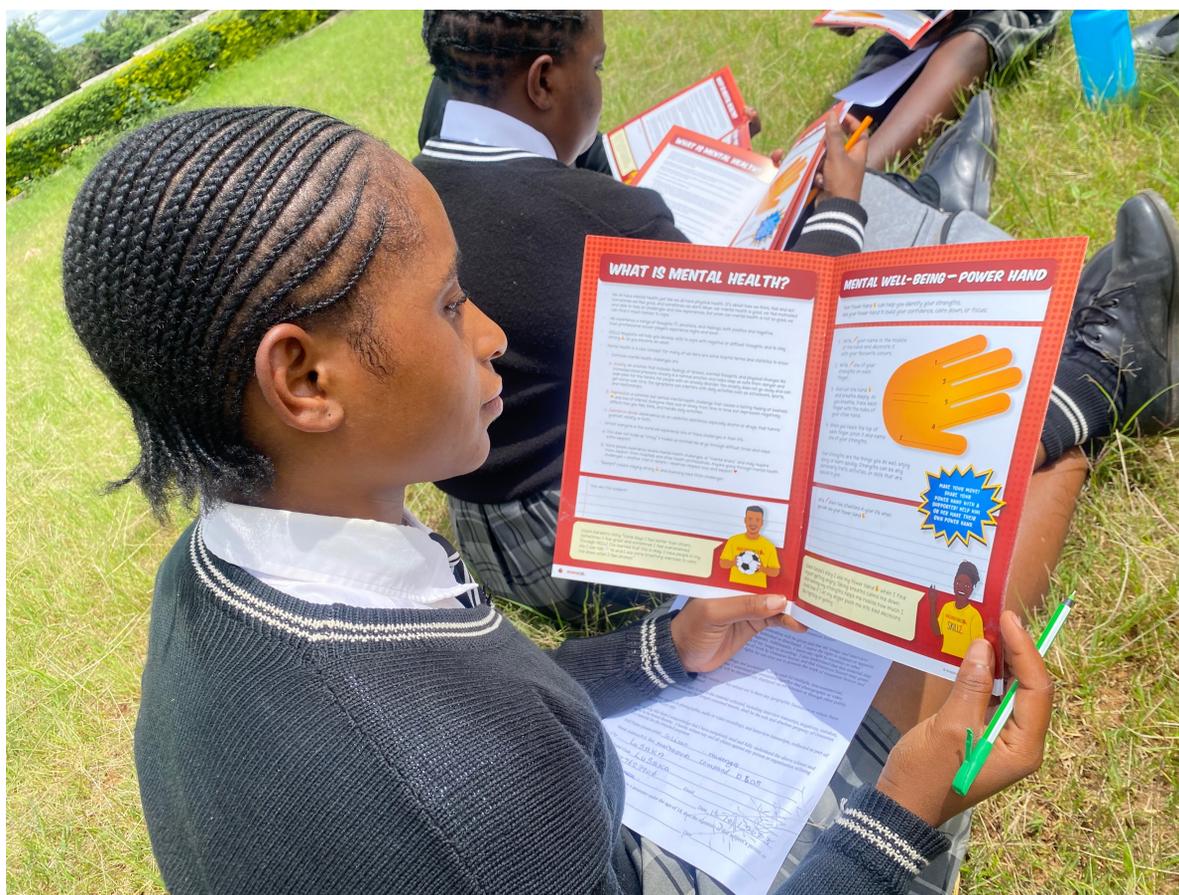
The evaluation included adolescent YLHIV participants, parents/guardians, volunteer antiretroviral therapy (ART) caregivers, and health service providers from 17 health facilities in Chipata (rural) and Lusaka (urban) districts. The participants were already connected to GRS through their participation in SKILLZ Plus, GRS's curriculum-based program for YLHIV.

1. Ayano, G., Demelash, S., Abraha, M., & Tsegay, L. (2021). The prevalence of depression among adolescent with HIV/AIDS: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *AIDS Research and Therapy*, 18(1), 23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12981-021-00351-1>

## METHODS

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to gather information:

- 269 matched pre/post surveys administered to YLHIV participants
- 4 focus group discussions held with YLHIV participants
- 22 interviews with YLHIV participants, including capturing photos of participants' writing and drawing in their Magazines
- 2 focus group discussions held with GRS Coaches
- 12 interviews conducted with participants' parents/guardians
- 15 interviews held with health service providers and volunteer ART caregivers

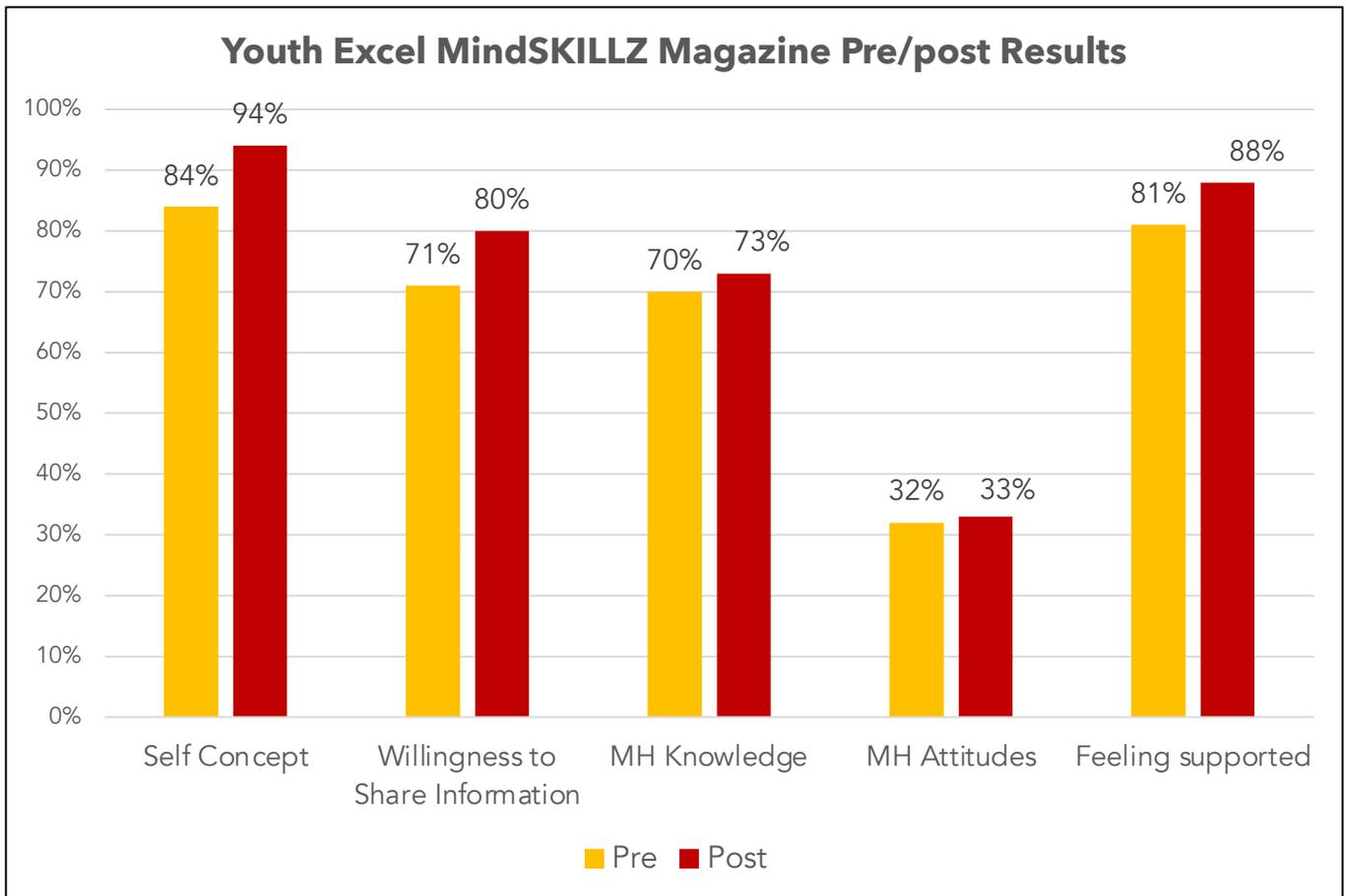


Learn more about Grassroot Soccer's mental health work in our [2022 Mental Health Impact Report](#).

# KEY RESULTS

## Effectiveness

- There was an overall pre/post change of 9% in mental health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, close to the GRS target of 10% change for in-person, Coach-led interventions.
- At baseline, values were generally high: for 16 of the 23 pre/post survey items, over 70% of participants answered correctly.
- The biggest relative % change observed was in participants' willingness to share mental health information, a 13% increase; the least change was observed in mental health attitudes, a 3% increase.
  - Negative wording of two items in the survey appears to have confused participants and negatively impacted quantitative results on mental health attitudes.



# KEY RESULTS CONTINUED

---

## Effectiveness Continued

Results from individual pre/post items showed the following:

- Of 23 items, 15 showed statistically significant positive change ( $p < 0.05$ ).<sup>2</sup> Some noteworthy positive changes included correct responses to the following:
  - “Society expects boys and girls to deal with their emotions differently.” (pre 80.7%, post 93.4%,  $p < 0.001$ )
  - “Like physical health, we all have mental health.” (pre 78.7%, post 90.2%,  $p < 0.001$ )
  - “I can identify my strengths, or things that I am good at in life.” (pre 81.2%, post 95.9%,  $p < 0.001$ )
- 3 items showed positive change that was not statistically significant.
- 3 items showed negative change that was not statistically significant.
- 2 items showed statistically significant negative change ( $p < 0.05$ ), likely impacted by negative wording that confused participants.

## Participant Relevance

Nearly all respondents viewed the Magazine favorably. They liked many of the topics covered and enjoyed the activities, and many reported that the Magazine was a useful tool to support mental health. Several adolescent participants shared:



I started reading [MindSKILLZ] Magazine last week. I have read it many times, like five times! When I am upset, I read what they wrote about taking a deep breath and closing your eyes. **I easily get upset, so after I read the Magazine, it helps me cool down.**



There are personal questions that I couldn't ask anyone; **[MindSKILLZ] Magazine features not only questions but also solutions that have helped me overcome stress and suicidal thoughts**[...] I was not comfortable talking to people about my situation. MindSKILLZ Magazine gave me the confidence to express myself.



---

2. Paired sample t-tests were conducted on individual pre-post items to assess significance of changes.

## KEY RESULTS CONTINUED

---

### *Stakeholder Relevance*

Parents/guardians and facility caregivers also viewed the Magazine positively, but in some cases reported they were not familiar enough with the content to give specific feedback. Some parents indicated that they had discussed the Magazine with their children, which made them better understand their children's emotions and experiences.

“The content is very interesting because young people **are able to write what they are feeling and are able to communicate through the Magazine** on what their thoughts are and challenges they are facing.”  
- Caregiver

“**The Magazine is useful for all adolescents because it has no stigma** like it's only meant for people who are HIV-positive. The way the content of the Magazine was written, it can apply to anyone.”  
- Parent

### *Engagement with Written Activities*

Based on both interviews and a review of participants' writing and drawing responses in their Magazines, participants demonstrated varying levels of understanding and engagement with the Magazine's written activities. Those in Lusaka demonstrated better understanding than those in Chipata. Not all participants completed all written activities, as some were limited by other commitments like schoolwork, chores, and/or work, while others had literacy challenges. One adolescent shared about their engagement with the Magazine:

“[In] Balance and Stress, we were told about some of the helpful ways of handling stress. I wrote down things like singing, reading, doing exercises, and taking deep breaths. **When I was stressed out with academic work I used them and they worked**, resulting in me studying more.”  
- Female Adolescent

Adolescents most commonly recommended that the Magazine content be translated into local languages, that more space be added for writing reflections and responses to prompts, instructions should be clarified, and jokes and puzzles should be increased and improved. Parents and caregivers suggested widening the distribution of the Magazine to include adolescents from schools and those not on ART.

## KEY RESULTS CONTINUED

### **Expert Review of MindSKILLZ Magazine**

GRS convened a committee of five adolescent mental health external experts to review and provide feedback to inform MindSKILLZ Magazine revisions. The process involved reviewing the materials, completing an open-ended online survey, and participating in semi-structured virtual consultations to explain feedback. The interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, producing several findings and recommendations:

- The Magazine's positive approach to mental health was appreciated by expert respondents. The experts described the language as simple and sensitive, while the activities were self-reflective and relatable to everyday life.



"The [MindSKILLZ] Magazine doesn't come from a place of suffering or adversity. **The positive language promotes acceptance and an attitude that 'I can do something for my mental health.'**"



- The experts felt the Magazine was practical, interactive, and inclusive. They also appreciated the topics covered, and suggested adding themes on failure, healthy relationships, and dealing with negative emotions.
- With regards to implementation, the experts recommended developing a tool kit and conducting training to capacitate facilitators on mental health among adolescents. Additionally, if the Magazine is going to ask players to revisit past traumatic experiences, experts recommended providing clear linkages to mental health professions.



## LIMITATIONS

- The Magazine was not tested among adolescents with no prior exposure to mental health content. Future research should consider evaluating the Magazine's effectiveness on different groups.
- Some adolescents who were administered the pre survey were not available at the time of the post survey, as they had returned to schools. This resulted in a smaller than planned sample of matched pre/post responses.
- Three negatively worded pre/post items appeared to confuse participants and ultimately resulted in a negative effect on survey items related to mental health attitudes and beliefs.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MindSKILLZ Magazine was effective, acceptable, and relevant to adolescents, parents/guardians, and adult stakeholders in health facilities. The complementary review by experts further praised the Magazine's interactiviveness, positive language, and youth-friendly approach in addressing mental health among adolescents. Both recommendations from the evaluation and expert review provide a basis for strengthening the Magazine's content moving forward.

Stakeholders should consider scaling up the implementation of community-based youth mental health interventions while using supplementary resources such as magazines.

Civil society organizations and partners should extend mental health investments to other young people besides those living with HIV, as well as make it more inclusive for differently abled youth and those with varying literacy levels.



For more information on this initiative, please contact:  
Andy Dallos, Director of Strategy and Innovation, at [adallos@grassrootsoccer.org](mailto:adallos@grassrootsoccer.org).