



Ashoka Advances Ideas for Social Change

Sponsoring online, open-source idea competitions to identify promising approaches to advancing social change, 2008–2011

SUMMARY

Between July 2008 and October 2011, [Ashoka Innovators for the Public](#)¹ (Ashoka) designed [Changeshops](#), an open-source, online platform and sponsored two worldwide online competitions through its [Changemakers](#)² initiative.

The first competition allowed Ashoka and the Robert Wood John Foundation (RWJF) staff to learn about programs that help people make better decisions regarding their health and the health of others. The second competition focused on system-changing solutions that move past narrow perceptions of mental health to expand understanding and involvement.

Ashoka previously sponsored idea competitions in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008, also funded by RWJF. See the [Program Results Report](#) on the 2006–2007 competition about health and social problems,³ and another [Program Results Report](#) on the 2007–2008 competition about challenges facing young men.⁴

Results

Project Director Sushmita Ghosh described the following results in a written report to RWJF and in an interview.

Changeshops

Ashoka developed the technology and content for the Changeshops online platform and tested and refined a version of it for inclusion on the Changemakers website. Ghosh calls Changeshops “a major breakthrough.” Ashoka seeks to establish Changeshops as the world’s premier, online international forum where social innovators introduce themselves

¹ Ashoka is an Arlington, Va.-based global association of social entrepreneurs with system-changing solutions for the world’s most urgent social problems.

² Ashoka Changemakers aims to grow new ideas through a process characterized by transparency and collaboration.

³ ID# 057515, available [online](#).

⁴ ID# 063280, available [online](#).

and their projects, seek funding and volunteers, and exchange ideas. Some 14 private and nonprofit organizations have raised more than \$400,000 to support good ideas proposed by innovators through Changeshops.

The Competitions

Three entrants won each competition, and winners received \$5,000 each.

The first competition, *Designing for Better Health*, ran from January–June 2009. It drew 280 entries from 29 countries and stimulated more than 330 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Paul Tarini, MA, RWJF senior program officer, chose 10 finalists. The Changemakers online community then voted on the most innovative projects. The following three were the winners:

- [Child Promoters on Oral Health. An alternative to achieve wellbeing](#) (Caracas, Barquisimeto, Guarenas and San Juan de los Morros, Venezuela)
- [Just a cloth piece?](#) (New Delhi, India)
- [Healthy Amazon](#) (San Francisco de Yarinacocha, Peru)

See the *Designing for Better Health* sidebar at the end of this report for more information about this competition.

The second competition, *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing*, ran from July–December 2009. It drew 338 entries from 42 countries and stimulated more than 300 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Jane Isaacs Lowe, PhD, RWJF senior program officer and director of the Vulnerable Populations portfolio, chose 11 finalists. The Changemakers online community then voted on the most innovative projects. The following three were the winners:

- [Active Minds: Empowering Students and Changing the Conversation about Mental Health on 300 Campuses](#) (United States)
- [Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society](#) (Bhutan)
- [Rebuilding Hope After War: Mental Health and Community Recovery](#) (Liberia)

See the *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing* sidebar at the end of this report for more information about this competition.

Funding

RWJF funded the development of Changeshops and the two idea competitions with a \$2,338,125 grant to Ashoka.

Afterward

Ashoka formally launched Changeshops on February 1, 2012. A three-year grant from Boehringer Ingelheim⁵ that began in 2011 will support its further development.

On October 26, 2011, Ashoka launched a new, online, collaborative idea competition funded by RWJF.⁶ This competition, *Innovations for Health: Solutions That Cross Borders*, aims to identify promising and innovative solutions to entrenched social and health problems that originate in the developing world and spread to the industrialized world (called reverse innovation). Winners will be announced in April 2012.

DESIGNING FOR BETTER HEALTH

Designing for Better Health was one of two online competitions⁷ sponsored in 2009 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and *Changemakers*, an initiative of *Ashoka Innovators for the Public* (Ashoka).⁸ The competitions sought innovative solutions to entrenched social and health problems. Entrants posted their ideas on the *Changemakers* website, where social entrepreneurs from across the world provided comments and feedback. See the [Program Results Report](#) for more information about the competitions.

The *Designing for Better Health* competition solicited solutions that encourage people to make better decisions regarding their own health and the health of others. Individuals and all types of organizations from any part of the world were eligible to enter. Winning solutions had to demonstrate a proof of impact.

Judges evaluated entries using the following criteria:

- **Innovation.** The solution should be substantially different from other initiatives in the field that encourage healthy living, and be ready for large-scale expansion.

⁵ [Boehringer Ingleheim](#) is an international pharmaceutical company based in Germany.

⁶ Grant ID# 69237

⁷ The other competition was *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing*. See the [sidebar](#) for information about this competition.

⁸ Ashoka is an Arlington, Va.-based international organization that strives to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive, and enables people throughout the world to think and act as changemakers. *Changemakers* is an initiative of Ashoka that aims to grow new ideas through transparency and collaboration.

- **Social impact.** The solution must demonstrate impact on its target population, either a specific underserved community or society at large, and have the potential for global application.
- **Sustainability.** The solution must have a long-term plan for continuing financial and community support.

And the Winners Are...

The *Designing for Better Health* competition received 280 entries from 29 countries and stimulated more than 330 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Paul Tarini, MA, RWJF senior program officer, chose 10 finalists. The Changemakers online community then picked three winners. Each winner received \$5,000. The winners were announced in June 2009:

Child Promoters on Oral Health. An alternative to achieve wellbeing

Sponsored by: Francesco Cammarano Pellegrino (program operates in Caracas, Barquisimeto, Guarenas and San Juan de los Morros, Venezuela)

Child Promoters on Oral Health. An alternative to achieve wellbeing began in 1998 and currently operates in four cities in Venezuela. It teaches oral health to children in their schools and teaches students to be promoters of oral health. Program dentists, dentistry students, and volunteers instruct children between the ages of 3 and 12 in how to care for their teeth. Approximately 20,000 low-income boys and girls receive training each year.

Through Child Promoters on Oral Health, children are encouraged to integrate oral health practices as a natural function of living. They are helped to transfer their knowledge and oral health practices to other children, their parents, and other adults. And, through their contact with health professionals, children lose their fear of dentists.

The program also introduces dentists and dental students to dentistry's social role in promoting oral health to vulnerable populations.

As a result of the Child Promoters on Oral Health, by 2009:

- More than 55,000 Venezuelan children received preventative dentistry treatment.
- 700 Venezuelan children were trained as oral health promoters.
- 180 preschools and education centers received oral disease prevention information.
- Over 500 dentistry students were introduced to the initiative.

The program is funded with donations from private companies. Additional resources are provided by universities. Plans are underway for industry-sponsored oral health programs that generate registration fees to further support *Child Promoters on Oral Health*.

Just a cloth piece?

Sponsored by: Anshu Gupta (New Delhi, India, program operates nationwide)

Launched in 2005, [Just a cloth piece?](#) is a nationwide initiative that focuses on menstrual hygiene among women in India. In India, shame and silence associated with menses make it a taboo subject, even among women. Without knowing the health risks, millions of menstruating women use sand, old rags, newspapers, and even plastic bags, due to the lack of available and affordable sanitary pads.

[Just a cloth piece?](#) promotes menstrual hygiene education. It also operates an affordable and hygienic cloth napkin production and distribution system that is benefiting tens of thousands of women every month. Through the program, old cloth is collected in India's urban areas, sanitized, and recycled into clean pads that are distributed mostly to women in rural areas. Each pad costs end-users approximately one penny. The program is also helping women in rural areas learn how to manufacture pads themselves to further reduce costs to consumers.

As of 2009, [Just a cloth piece?](#) produced 100,000 hygienic cloth pads per month that benefit 20,000 women. The program's near-term goal is to reach 100,000 women monthly.

[Just a cloth piece?](#) receives support from corporations, colleges, schools, hospitals, hotels, and individuals. In 21 Indian states, it has built partnerships with 150 grassroots groups that include units of the India army, nongovernment groups, community-based organizations, and social activists.

In addition to building its current base of support, [Just a cloth piece?](#) intends to advocate around menstrual health issues at national and international venues to attract additional investment to the program.

Healthy Amazon

Sponsored by: Diego Garcia Montufar (program operates in San Francisco de Yarinacocha, Peru)

Launched in 2008, the [Healthy Amazon](#) initiative combines sanitation and nutrition through a low-cost waste management program that produces compost for family gardens. The family gardens, in turn, produce vegetables that help remedy child malnutrition in the Amazon region of Peru.

Every indigenous community in the Peruvian Amazon lacks appropriate waste management, and most children living in those communities suffer from malnutrition. [Healthy Amazon](#) encourages people to abandon the traditional habit of burning

compostable waste or throwing it into the street and to instead offer the waste for collection.

Healthy Amazon provided San Francisco de Yarinacocha with its first waste management service. Some 95 percent of the community's 2,000 residents participate in the program, thereby reducing the risk of preventable illness associated with waste contamination.

The program also encourages parents to grow vegetables in their family gardens, thereby introducing vegetables into the diet.

Healthy Amazon's agricultural impact includes:

- A family garden program with the potential of reaching approximately 500 children who currently have few vegetables in their diet
- Distribution of compost to 80 artisans who use it to grow trees for hand-craft production
- Distribution of compost to 100 farmers through a partnership with an agro-forestry project promoted by the government

Healthy Amazon would like to export its model throughout the region.

Initial funding for Healthy Amazon came from the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility of Swarthmore College and from Ciudad Saludable.⁹ The sale of recyclables and compost to businesses and associations partially sustain the program, along with resources from governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Plans for future program sustainability include working with local governments to develop a pay system for waste collection services, the establishment of a commercial vegetable garden and a commercial reforestation project.

RETHINKING MENTAL HEALTH: IMPROVING COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing was one of two online competitions¹⁰ sponsored in 2009 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and *Changemakers*, an initiative of *Ashoka Innovators for the Public* (Ashoka).¹¹ The

⁹ *Ciudad Saludable* is an organization in Peru committed to sustainable development and environmentally sound solid waste management policies.

¹⁰ The other competition was *Designing for Better Health*. See the [sidebar](#) for more information about this competition.

¹¹ Ashoka is an Arlington, Va.-based international organization that strives to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive, and enables people

competitions sought innovative solutions to entrenched social and health problems. Entrants posted their ideas on the Changemakers website, where social entrepreneurs from across the world provided comments and feedback. See the [Program Results Report](#) for more information about the competitions.

The *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing* competition solicited entries that demonstrated system-changing solutions that move past narrow perceptions of mental health to expand understanding and collective involvement in finding solutions. Individuals and all types of organizations from any part of the world were eligible to enter. Winning solutions had to demonstrate proof of impact.

Judges evaluated entries according to the following criteria:

- **Innovation.** The solution should be substantially different from other initiatives in the field of mental health, and be ready for large-scale expansion.
- **Social impact.** The solution must demonstrate impact on its target population, either a specific underserved community or society at large, and have the potential for global application.
- **Sustainability.** The solution must have a long-term plan for continuing financial and community support.

And the Winners Are...

The *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing* competition received 338 entries from 42 countries and stimulated more than 300 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Jane Isaacs Lowe, PhD, RWJF senior program officer and director of the Vulnerable Populations portfolio, chose 11 finalists. The Changemakers online community then picked three winners, with each one receiving \$5,000. The following winners were announced in December 2009:

Active Minds: Empowering Students and Changing the Conversation about Mental Health on 300 Campuses

Sponsored by: Alison Malmon (United States)

The nonprofit organization, [Active Minds](#), which is funded entirely through private contributions, establishes and supports student-run mental health awareness groups on college and university campuses in the United States, Canada and Australia. Active Minds reaches students *through* students by empowering students to tell their stories, educate their peers, and work closely with clinical service providers to break the unnecessary stigma that surrounds mental health.

throughout the world to think and act as changemakers. Changemakers is an initiative of Ashoka that aims to grow new ideas through transparency and collaboration.

With a small staff and a cadre of students and college-staff volunteers nationwide, since its founding in 2003, Active Minds has:

- Established 216 chapters on campuses in 40 states, Washington, Canada, and Australia
- Engaged more than 3,000 student advocates
- Educated college counseling center staff about the organization's mission to ensure staff support for *Active Minds* chapters
- Created and distributed guidelines and tools to promote new chapters and support existing chapters
- Emerged as a leading voice in student mental health advocacy, helping to ensure that students' voices are heard by government agencies such as the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrations.

Active Minds' near-term goal is to establish 300 campus chapters in the United States.

Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society

Sponsored by: **Chencho Dorji (Bhutan)**

Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society links traditional forms of mental health treatment with modern mental health practices. The acceptance of modern medicine in general, and modern psychiatric practices in particular, is a challenge in Bhutan where most people prefer traditional forms of medicine provided by religious healers, shamans, astrologers, and herbal doctors. These traditional treatments have not been effective in treating severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia.

Launched in 2002 as a pilot program of the Psychiatry Department of the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital,¹² **Promoting Mental Health Treatment in Traditional Bhutanese Society** is designed to:

- Introduce modern mental health practices in traditional Bhutanese society.
- Mobilize community support to identify and treat severely mentally ill people.
- Provide a way for traditional healers and modern health workers to work together.
- Train primary health workers to diagnose and treat mental disorders in the community, whether or not they participate in the program.

The program operates in three of Bhutan's 17 districts. As of 2009 it has:

¹² The **Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital** is a public organization under the Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan.

- Identified, diagnosed, and begun treating more than 300 severely mentally ill patients, including giving medications
- Trained more than 60 health workers about mental health
- Delivered mental health orientation programs to more than 500 community leaders, traditional healers, and government civil servants.
- Established successful partnerships between traditional and modern mental health workers, who have started working together to provide treatment and avoid duplication and confusion among patients
- Educated political leaders and government bureaucrats about the mental health needs of the population

The project is funded by the Government of Bhutan, which also serves as a conduit for external funding. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations such as the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) contribute to the program. The program hopes to expand into one or two additional districts of Bhutan each year until it covers the entire country.

Rebuilding Hope After War: Mental Health and Community Recovery

Sponsored by: Pat Lee, MD, DTM&H (program operates in Liberia)

Rebuilding Hope After War, an initiative of **Tiyatien Health**, forges partnerships with Liberian communities to treat depression and epilepsy, reduce false beliefs about these conditions, and eliminate stigma from people who suffer from depression and epilepsy.

Tiyatien Health, founded by survivors of Liberia's twenty-year civil war, modeled this initiative on its successful HIV/AIDS program. During the Liberian civil war, combatants and civilians suffered physical and sexual abuse leading to high rates of mental illness. A random survey of Liberian adults conducted in 2008 found that 40 percent met symptom criteria for major depressive disorder and 44 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The high incidence of head trauma and infectious diseases contributes to an epilepsy rate as high as 5 percent.

Liberia has fewer than 50 public physicians serving its population of 3.5-million, making it critical for health professionals to go beyond relying solely on physicians. **Rebuilding Hope After War** addresses depression and epilepsy in Liberia by:

- Training nonphysician clinicians in simplified, evidence-based protocols for treating depression and epilepsy
- Employing community health workers to: identify patients, lead group counseling sessions, directly observe medication administration and monitor medication side effects, visit patients in their homes, and promote early care-seeking among neighbors

- Delivering free services through the public Tubman Hospital

The initiative produced the following results:

- The Liberian Ministry of Public Health adopted its first National Mental Health Policy in 2009
- Capacity for chronic disease care has increased in the country's forested southeast
- By hiring community health workers for the initiative, Tiyatien Health expanded its role as the largest employer of the poor in the Tchien District of Liberia.

Rebuilding Hope After War is supported through a partnership with the Liberian Ministry of Health and volunteer researchers, statisticians, epidemiologists, physicians, economists, health system experts, health consultants, and student workers. Collaborators in the United States include researchers and professionals at Harvard, Columbia, and John Hopkins universities and the University of California, San Francisco.

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