

the storycloth

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A Warm Welcome



from drawing board...

I couldn't think of a better asset to have in my neighborhood than a house that heals.

Betty McCollum, U.S. Representative (D-MN) and CVT neighbor

When CVT opens the doors to its new St. Paul Healing Center this spring it will be a testament to the power of community.

From neighbors who spoke in favor of a zoning variance that allowed the treatment center to open in their neighborhood to professionals and vendors who donated their goods and expertise.

From the city of St. Paul, which showed its support for the

project with a STAR Grant to the 65 volunteers who worked more than 350 hours painting, staining and cleaning the interior.

From the more than 60 individuals, foundations and corporations who made gifts specifically to the St. Paul house to the thousands of people who regularly support CVT's operations.

This is truly the house that you helped build.

As *Storycloth* goes to press we are putting the finishing touches on the interior – screwing in light bulbs and moving in desks. A public grand opening will be held May 6.

The house itself is a gracious Victorian single-family home built

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in 1886. In the course of the reconstruction we restored it to its original style and maintained its historical integrity while nearly doubling the floor space.

According to CVT Community Resource Developer Tait Danielson, “The house now looks more like it was when it was first built than when we bought it.” All of the additional square footage was added in the back so that, from the street, the cheerful yellow house still looks very much at home with its neighbors.

Inside, while true to the style of the house, the interior design takes the needs of torture survivors into account. The welcoming rooms have comfortable armchairs but no couches or loveseats, so that those who need to maintain a comfortable personal space can do so. The walls are angled or curved to avoid a boxy feeling and the windows are large to let in plenty of natural light. Overhead lights are domed and muted; there are no canister lights or exposed light bulbs in the public areas.

Our staff will care for clients in 15 counseling rooms, a chart room, a physical therapy room, an exam room and three group counseling rooms. The first floor of the house is handicapped-accessible. This doubles our capacity for client care in St. Paul.

A grant from the Phillips Foundation has made it possible for us to expand our services. Most St. Paul clients will now attend group rather than individual counseling. Having two approaches to therapy will help us meet the different needs of our clients.

All of our clients will still get the personal attention they need and will also have the opportunity to build relationships and learn that they are not alone in their pain.

They, too, will experience the healing power of community.



...to real

From Minnesota to Africa and Back Again



Ally Beckman with Liberian mental health paraprofessionals from Boreah refugee camp, near Kissidougou, Guinea.

“I arrived in Guinea in the dry season and it was just incredibly dusty,” Ally Beckman remembers. “The air conditioning was broken in the trucks, so we had to have the windows rolled down on our two-hour drive into the refugee camps and back each day. We’d get home just covered in dust.

“But what I remember most is that we would have to pull over all the time because these huge UNHCR convoys were passing. And they were taking Sierra Leonean refugees home.

“I felt so lucky to be able to see that. And I know the Liberians still in the camps were glad to see it, too. They want to go home, too, back to their rice farms. They’re sick of eating bulgur all the time!”

Ally spent a year in the West African country of Guinea, living in Kissidougou and working with refugees from Sierra Leone and Guinea. As a CVT clinician and trainer, she held group counseling sessions and trained mental health paraprofessionals – who are



Pictures: More than 60 volunteers helped paint, stain and clean the interior of the new healing center at 649 Dayton in St. Paul, Minn.



refugees themselves – to facilitate them as well.

Now back in the United States, Ally is a clinical social worker with CVT’s St. Paul healing team. This year the St. Paul team is trying something a little bit different: Most clients will attend group counseling sessions, rather than receiving counseling one-on-one. Clients in Minneapolis will continue individual counseling.

Ally says she’s eager to start applying what she learned about group work in West Africa here in Minnesota. She

worked with more than 30 groups and helped train more than 40 paraprofessionals while she was there, and so will have plenty of experience to draw on.

“Something powerful happens in groups,” she explains. “People from different communities, many of whom have lost their families, people who have had their sense of trust badly damaged, come together. They get to know other people in a safe environment, they build trust and establish relationships.”

Torture survivors often suffer alone, feeling that no one will

believe them, that no one has experienced what they have and that they cannot trust other people. Like working with an individual counselor, group counseling helps because, as Ally explains, “Healing from torture happens in relationships.”

The transition back to life in the U.S. hasn’t been that chal-

lenging for Ally – she’s done it twice before after a year-long stint in Burkina Faso and a semester in Madagascar. And she’s already very familiar with CVT’s work, having spent one year here as a

social work intern and two as a clinical social work fellow.

She says she was looking forward to shorter commutes back in the States – but a snowy Minnesota winter is almost as challenging as a dusty African road. She still has warm memories and strong connections from her time in Africa.

“I just can’t emphasize enough what a joy it was to work with the Liberians,” she says. “They all have this amazing energy and spirit. Everything we did involved singing and dancing. They are just a hopeful group of people.”

CVT has trained more than 100 West African refugees to be mental health paraprofessionals

Upcoming Dates

June 23 - CVT will present the Eclipse Award at a congressional reception in Washington, D.C., in honor of UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (June 26).

June 24 - CVT will host an event for supporters and clients of CVT in Minnesota. For more information, go to www.cvt.org.

Sept. 29-Oct. 2 - CVT's New Tactics in Human Rights Project will host an international symposium for 400 human rights advocates in Ankara, Turkey. For more information, go to www.newtactics.org.

Do you know anyone who would be interested in learning more about CVT? Please pass on this newsletter or contact us at cvt@cvt.org or 612 436 4800.

Take Action! Fully Fund the TVRA

Thank you! Thanks to your support and the support of key members of Congress, President Bush signed the reauthorization of the Torture Victims Relief Act into law in December.

But our work is not done! Congress is now in the process of making appropriations decisions. This means that, while the TVRA authorizes a total of \$81 million over two years for torture treatment in the U.S. and abroad, we need your help to be sure that Congress authorizes the full amount.

What Can You Do?

Use the sample letter at right to tell your congressional delegation that you believe the TVRA should be fully funded. To have an impact on the appropriations process, your message needs to reach Congress by April 1. For more information go to www.cvt.org.

The best way to reach members of Congress is by telephone, fax or, less ideally, e-mail. Due to security measures, mail is currently taking four to six weeks to reach government offices.

For help finding the names, addresses and fax numbers of your senators and representatives, visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov or call your representatives and senators via the congressional switchboard at (800) 839-5276.

Dear _____:

As a supporter of the Center for Victims of Torture I know that torture survivors can recover from their trauma and rebuild successful lives.

Now that the Torture Victims Relief Act has been reauthorized, I want it to be fully funded at the levels approved by Congress and signed into law by President Bush. Please urge Senators Specter and Harkin and Congressmen Regula and Obey of the appropriations subcommittees on labor, health and human services and education to mark an appropriation of \$25 million for 2005.

Please also urge Senators McConnell and Leahy and Congressmen Kolbe and Lowey of the subcommittees on foreign operations to mark appropriations of \$12 million for USAID and \$7 million as a U.S. contribution to the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture for 2005.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,