

the storycloth

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Reconnecting Clients, Restoring Lives

Emotional isolation can be a devastating long-term effect of torture. Survivors often feel alone and detached from society. But CVT provides survivors with hope by reconnecting them with community. Through its U.S. and international treatment programs, CVT helps clients learn to trust and interact with others, restoring their social connections.

Reconnecting through Art

Volunteer Holly Nelson began teaching art classes to CVT clients in St. Paul in January 2006. An artist with a degree in African studies, Nelson teaches beginning and

intermediate drawing and painting techniques.

Three or four clients attend the two-hour sessions, learning to mix colors, create depth perception and show shadow and light. To supplement the class, each client is given a basic set of art materials, including sketch pad, charcoal pencil, eraser and water color paints. This portable art kit encourages clients to use their developing skills at any time—at home, on the bus or while waiting for an appointment.

The classes do more than teach techniques, according to Nelson. They give clients something positive to look forward to each week.

One West African art student has enjoyed learning about color and using light and shadow in drawings. “I’ve learned how to look at an image in a three-dimensional way and draw all its features exactly how it is,” he said. But for this artist, drawing also helps him cope with his memories. “When I

have nightmares I get up and start drawing,” he said, because it makes him forget about the past for the moment.

The budding artists learn from and support each other while developing their artistic talents. “It’s an exciting learning curve,” said Nelson, when students realize they can create an accurate drawing of an object.

In reconnecting clients to the community, art also provides a means for survivors to express feelings and hopes for the future.

Another student said that for him art “is a way of taking my inner self out. It’s given me an avenue to talk about what is in my mind. It’s a way of expressing myself.” He has learned that when he feels lonely or depressed he can pick up a pencil or a paintbrush and create something that brings a smile to his face. “It’s like magic,” he declared.

Healing through Nature

Experiencing nature also reconnects clients with themselves

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An art student working on a charcoal drawing of a dove.

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From the Executive Director

In our last newsletter, we told you about CVT's new healing program in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since then, the nation declared Joseph Kabila the first democratically elected president in 45 years.

It was not certain Kabila's political opponent would accept defeat without violence, and there was some fighting. But African leaders and the United Nations worked hard for a peaceful result.

All Congolese breathed a sigh of relief.

During and after the election, CVT worked to set up an office and hire staff. Edie Lewison, CVT's Africa Desk Officer, sent e-mails from Lubumbashi describing the difficulties of rebuilding in a postconflict nation. To buy mouse traps, insecticide and fans, Edie went to 15 stores. At an outdoor market, one vendor wanted to sell two towels and a bath mat for \$80. (She declined.)

But she also shared the excitement she and recently hired Congolese staff felt on their first community event to build awareness of human rights and CVT's mental health services:

"As we were slowly driving a man caught up with me and ran alongside the vehicle, telling me in English that he had been in prison and tortured for over ten years. I was happy to tell him to come to the office and see us. Another gentleman who had been imprisoned and tortured for many years joined our group and came back to downtown with us. It was exciting to see the enthusiasm of the PSCs [CVT's psychosocial counselors], who organized everything.... We handed out 2,000 [human rights] brochures to people who asked for them."

In the last election, Congolese voted in large numbers. They are tired of war. And we are proud to work with them to heal the wounds of war.



Douglas A. Johnson

Annual Renewal Gifts Create Healing and Hope

Each year in February, the Friends of CVT are asked to renew their support for the Center for Victims of Torture as part of an Annual Renewal Campaign. Renewal gifts received early in the year have a significant impact because CVT is then able to invest in efforts that produce results in the months ahead. These gifts also help underwrite CVT's day-to-day operations, especially those programs that help torture survivors heal from their wounds.

The 2007 Annual Renewal Campaign will also provide essen-

tial support for the organization's increased presence in Washington, D.C. CVT staff is working hard to close all the loopholes on the use of torture by United States personnel. By working with the Administration and Congress, CVT is also striving to win more funding for torture treatment in the U.S. and abroad.

So, when you receive your renewal request, please respond generously. If you wish to renew with a secure online contribution, visit www.cvt.org and click on "DONATE NOW." You can also sign up for CVT's monthly giving

program, the Circle of Hope.

If you have questions or concerns about your membership, you are welcome to contact CVT's development staff by calling toll-free: 1-877-265-8775

CVT has hired

22

*psychosocial counselors
for the Democratic Republic
of Congo program.*

Reconnecting Clients, Restoring Lives

From page 1

and others. CVT fosters this with volunteer-led activities and a partnership with Wilderness Inquiry that is funded by the Sundance Family Foundation.

Wilderness Inquiry has included CVT clients, volunteers and staff on outdoor adventures with people from different communities. Clients have hiked in northern Minnesota, kayaked for five days in the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior and canoed on Minneapolis lakes.



While clients are often initially frightened to attend, their bravery is rewarded with newfound assurance in their ability to socialize with others. Survivors learn they can be accepted as they are, while not revealing their pasts.

“I met people and it was easy to socialize,” said a man from Cameroon who participated in several trips. He found the other attendees were very friendly and that he had the confidence to meet people.

The West African artist was able to learn to kayak with people from different cities, but not feel like an outcast. “We were like a family,” he stated, eating and interacting together as a group.

For some clients being successful in a new activity can set a foundation for future accomplishments because

they learn to overcome fear.

Watching other people flip their kayaks in the water as they learned safety procedures was at first frightening for the West African artist, but once he learned how to do it he found everything else went smoothly. “It made me feel alive,” he exclaimed.

Even simple activities like nature walks can help clients reconnect with people and their surroundings. Volunteer Chris Soutter led clients on a walk through a nature center last fall teaching them about local plants and animals. “When someone is outside experiencing nature, often the focus is very much in the present,” said Soutter.

“Conversations and observations can center on what is being seen and heard at that moment. And in a nature preserve, the moment usually feels peaceful and good.”

Reconnecting Communities in West Africa

Reconnecting survivors to their community is an important part of the healing process in West Africa, as well.

In Koindu, Sierra Leone, CVT brought together survivors, police officers and other community members for a day of athletic competitions. The integrated teams competed against each other in races, tugs-of-war and other games. Working together, individual team members began to develop empathy for each other and learn how to minimize intimidating behaviors.

In another CVT-facilitated program, former child combatants who had participated in a dance and movement therapy group performed in a Cultural Healing Event for the community. By dra-

“[Art] is a way of taking my inner self out. It’s given me an avenue to talk about what is in my mind.”

—Survivor and art student

matizing their experience in dance, the child combatants were able to express what they endured. They then asked to be accepted back into their community. Following the performance, six local leaders rose to welcome the teens back into the Koindu community. The leaders encouraged the young people to begin renewing social connections that were torn apart by violence.

At CVT, helping survivors restore social connections is critical to the healing process. By reconnecting, survivors begin to add meaning to their lives. They learn to trust strangers, to relate to new people and begin to live in a community again. By helping survivors reconnect, CVT helps restore lives.

CVT thanks Unity Church-Unitarian for providing a workspace and art materials for CVT clients.



Acrylic paintings of a lantern (left) and sunlight on water (above left) by a CVT art student.

Volunteer Shares Gift of Music

By Patricia Drey

When Monica Nyaoro heard about a special event sponsored by the Center for Victims of Torture, she volunteered to help out by giving the organization a unique gift—two original songs.

Nyaoro—who has been composing music for 17 years—composed and performed two pieces especially for the Center for Victims of Torture to commemorate United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on June 26. Her sister, Alice Tindi, a social worker at CVT, performed with her.

Nyaoro came to Minnesota to

visit her sister about one year ago. She had recently retired after spending 21 years teaching music at Kericho Teachers College in Kenya. Nyaoro plays piano and melodica (a free-reed instrument) and sings. She also teaches various cultural dances from 12 different tribes in Kenya such as the Luya, Luo and Kamba dances. Currently, Nyaoro said she is resting, but still keeping busy writing a music book.

Nyaoro has strong feelings about torture and wants to show her appreciation for CVT's work in any way she can.

One of the songs Nyaoro wrote focused on women, who, she said, are often the victims of torture when

wars occur in African countries.

"The people remaining . . . are women and children," Nyaoro said. "They are the ones who are tortured; who are raped."

The other song she wrote thanked CVT for its work. She said she's happy that people at CVT go out of their way to help those who have been tortured.

"I'm really happy for that, and I know God is also happy and will continue blessing the center," Nyaoro said.

**Monica Nyaoro
sings on June 26,
2006 at the
Minneapolis
Healing Center.**



Report from Washington . . .

Renewing U.S. Commitment to Torture Treatment

The 110th Congress convened January 4 with ten new senators and 53 new congressional representatives. CVT and colleague torture treatment centers are working to meet with new and returning members to educate them on the need for torture treatment.

The Torture Victims Relief Act must be reauthorized in 2007. Known as TVRA, the bill provides urgently needed funds for treatment of torture victims in the U.S. It also funds treatment centers abroad that are engaged in the dangerous work of documenting torture in their countries and healing the victims.

Please join CVT and ask your

senators and representative to cosponsor reauthorization of TVRA in 2007. This legislation has historically received strong bipartisan support. As the late Sen. Paul Wellstone said, "Providing treatment for torture survivors is one of the best ways we can show our commitment to fighting human rights abuses around the world."

Opposing Abusive Detention Policies

The new Congress is showing signs of interest in ending the secrecy with which the U.S. has detained and interrogated terrorist suspects. Members on both sides of the aisle have expressed support for hearings to

shed light on current Administration policies.

In an effort to end the secrecy, CVT urged Attorney General Alberto Gonzales to release two documents. The documents outline interrogation methods approved by the president and the U.S. Justice Department, and the authority to create prisons outside the U.S.

CVT is working to support hearings in various congressional committees to gather more information about current policies. The goal is to understand what the administration has authorized so appropriate legislation can be drafted to correct the violations of law. You can help.

Visit www.cvt.org for up-to-date information and suggested actions.