

the storycloth

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New Neighbors/Hidden Scars

The migration of refugees and immigrants to the suburbs of major metropolitan areas is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Minnesota, the adjacent suburbs of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center, located just north of Minneapolis, have become hubs of African immigrant communities. Estimates by the Minnesota State Demographic Center suggest 15,000 – 20,000 immigrants have settled in this community of 100,000 in recent years. The majority of the new neighbors are Liberians.

CVT estimates that 8,500 survivors of torture are living in the Brooklyn Park/Brooklyn Center area. Many suffer from debilitating physical and psychological problems as a result of their torture. Their symptoms can include chronic pain in muscles and joints, recurring headaches, intense and incessant nightmares, insomnia, reduced mobility, weakness, low energy levels, severe depression and anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, guilt and self-hatred, and an inability to concentrate, remember, or form trusting relationships with others.

With so many torture survivors located in one small community, CVT is developing a new initiative to expand the resources available for healing. The New Neighbors/Hidden Scars project brings

together organizations and agencies located in Brooklyn Park/Brooklyn Center to promote healing among torture survivors living in their community.

Barriers to care

Many refugees and immigrants face barriers to care and this is true in Brooklyn Park/Brooklyn Center. One study found that nearly 70 percent of refugees and immigrants in Northwest Hennepin County said medical, dental and mental health services were neither available nor affordable in their area. They cited mental health concerns, accessing care, depression and anxiety, family conflicts, school issues, and cultural conflicts as the most pressing concerns. The study, conducted in 2004 by the Northwest Hennepin Family Services Collaborative, underlined the significant challenges faced by refugees and immigrants as they work to build new lives in our country.

CVT clients and other torture survivors living in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center also experience transportation challenges. When making the 12-mile trip to the healing center in

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New Tactics Hosts Asia Regional Training Workshop

“Through the workshop tools, networking, and looking at what others are doing, I gained confidence and inspiration to use the new tactics in my program,” concluded one human rights practitioner from Malaysia after seven intense days at the New Tactics Asia Regional Training Workshop.

The workshop, held August 5-11 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was an initiative to share and develop ideas, practices and skills to effectively advance human rights. More than 50 innovative human rights practitioners from 21 countries were accepted into the workshop.

The core of the program consisted of hands-on practical exercises to educate attendees on innovative tactics for promoting human rights. Eighteen trainer-participants led eight tactical trainings and two strategy building sessions. The trainers presented a particular human rights tactic and then outlined how to turn the tactic into action. The

trainees then participated in a guided exercise to apply the tactics to a particular situation, incorporating the new information into their knowledge base.

A few of the tactics featured included:

- **Using action theater to analyze a specific social problem and stimulate community action.** Ain O Salish Kendra in Bangladesh forms local theater teams to raise awareness of and protest human



Asia workshop participants identify tactical stakeholders

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New Tax Legislation Makes Charitable Giving More Attractive

The Hurricane Katrina Relief Act includes provisions that may affect your contributions before December 31, 2005. This legislation increases the limit for cash contributions from 50 to 100 percent of adjusted gross income – for gifts made between August 28 and December 31. These contributions may be made to any tax exempt nonprofit entity, including the Center for Victims of Torture. For some individuals, this may be the year to use IRAs and other qualified retirement plans to make a charitable contribution.

Other provisions in the Hurricane Relief Act provide additional tax savings for those whose adjusted gross income is above \$145,000. Gifts to private foundations and donor advised funds are *ineligible* for both the higher contribution limit and the

\$145,000 exemption.

Even without this special encouragement from Congress, many individuals find it helpful to use appreciated assets in making charitable gifts. As you plan your giving, you may wish to consider the following factors:

- The stock market has been up and down all year, but stock you have held for many years is likely to have appreciated in value – and thus is subject to capital gains tax. You may avoid these taxes by contributing the stock to the Center for Victims of Torture – and take an income tax deduction for the current market price of the stock.
- If some of your investments have dropped in value below their original purchase price, you may want to sell the stock and then use the funds from the

sale to make your charitable contributions. You may then receive a tax deduction for *both* your investment loss and your charitable gift.

- Now is the season when many individuals and families review their wills or living trusts. Establishing a charitable bequest is an effective way to sustain your commitment to create a legacy of healing and hope for torture survivors.

To arrange gifts of stock or for other information about planned gifts, please contact Jan Clymer (jclymer@cvt.org or 612/436-4859). This information is not intended as legal or financial advice. An attorney or other professional advisor should be consulted before making any estate planning decisions.

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rights violations in their cities and towns. Portraying a human rights abuse through drama offers an accessible way to engage the community on the issue. Human rights abuses in the areas of under-age marriage and divorce have dropped substantially as the community becomes pro-active and participates in identifying solutions illustrated in the action plays.

- **Using community mediation to prevent torture.** The Center for Victims of

Torture, Nepal created community mediation as an alternative that by-passes the criminal justice system, effectively preventing countless incidents of torture. It is currently expanding this mediation system to cover one-third of the country's population.

- **Building collaborative partnerships between nongovernmental organizations, police and the community.** FORUM-ASIA developed a training course based on the practical needs of ordinary police officers with a focus on teaching general behavioral skills. The training is now being institutionalized within the Royal Thai Police and, with their support, is being promoted to other Asian countries.
- **Advocating for human rights by utilizing religious perspectives.** National Working Group for the Socialization of Human Rights Values through Education in Indonesia developed and is implementing a core human rights curriculum at all levels of the education system, public and private. The group consulted and involved religious and community leaders in developing and promoting the curriculum in order to overcome the perception that human rights values are Western.
- **Engaging transport trade unions as key stakeholders in HIV/AIDS education and treatment.** NGO Service Delivery Program in Bangladesh engaged the transport workers' unions to expand health care centers within trade union offices for 3 million transport workers. These centers are used as comprehensive health care clinics where transport workers receive information about safer sexual practice and preven-

tion of sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

The Asia workshop was the fifth and final in a series of regional workshops coordinated by CVT's New Tactics in Human Rights Project. The project partnered with FORUM-ASIA, a regional human rights organization based in Thailand, to plan and coordinate the event.

During the past four years, the project also held workshops in Central and Eastern Europe (April 2002), Africa (May 2003), Western Europe and North America (November 2003) and Latin America (June 2004). A regional training seminar for the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean was held in September 2003.

The New Tactics project gives people working on a broad range of human rights issues access to tools to help them improve the way they do their work. You can find more information about New Tactics, including publications and training events, at www.newtactics.org.

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(612) 436-4800
www.cvt.org
cvt@cvt.org

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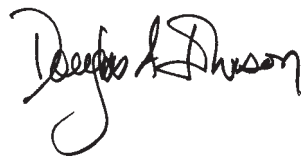
Our mission: To heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities, and to stop torture worldwide.

Restoring the dignity
of the human spirit



Tactical map created by Asia Training participants

In 2005, a record number of individuals, foundations, and other organizations have come forward to support the Center for Victims of Torture. I'm grateful for this outpouring of generosity, and all of us at CVT are inspired by the courage and compassion these gifts represent.



Douglas A. Johnson, Executive Director

From the Executive Director



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Minneapolis, they often must travel two hours by bus. The trip can be even more difficult in winter months, with cold, snowy weather and bus delays.

There are several primary care clinics, mental health centers, work assistance programs and other organizations that serve the African immigrant community within the area. Yet many of them haven't known how to help. They have little knowledge or experience in serving the needs of war trauma and torture survivors. They don't know what questions to ask and are unfamiliar with the experiences of torture survivors.

These barriers often make it impossible for those who need help to get it.

Building Capacity for Hope and Healing

In an effort to address these issues and promote restoration in the African immigrant community, CVT has designed the New Neighbors/Hidden Scars program. Funded by a generous grant from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi LLP Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice, a supporting organization of The Minneapolis Foundation, and with additional major grant support from UCare Minnesota and the Otto Bremer Foundation, the three-year program brings together community care providers to learn from CVT and each other. Through this network the organizations will develop referral systems, educate the community on depression and posttraumatic stress disorder, and work to minimize the stigma of mental health and heal the wounds of torture.

At an initial planning meeting in September 2004, 40 representatives from

local organizations met for the first time. Those attending reported the consequences of unmet needs among torture and war trauma survivors affecting both the African immigrant community and society in general. High rates of unemployment, increased incidences of domestic violence, more homeless refugee children, and the cost of treating medical conditions in the emergency room all influence the community and quality of life.

To address these issues and pull together the many community care systems, CVT is establishing a network of existing organizations and service providers. The mutual assistance agencies, schools, churches and African organizations will work to educate the community on the long-term results of torture and identify individuals who may need restorative care. Primary care centers, mental health specialists, and other medical professionals are developing a more coordinated system of care and referrals.

Patricia Shannon, Ph.D., L.P., is developing and managing the program. Shannon and other CVT staff consult with the network to provide training, develop solutions, and coordinate healing in the community of survivors.

"We've been working to identify care providers and provide education and information," says Shannon. "It's crucial to the program that the providers get to know each other so they can provide more integrated care and referrals."

CVT is actively working to develop the network of participants, scheduling meetings, and planning agendas. Developing the network includes providing training to care providers. Shannon and her team have

already provided training on several topics such as the psychological effects of torture, working with interpreters, cross-cultural care, and working with refugee children in schools.

Another important aspect of the program is to develop communication strategies about the effects of torture and resources available. "Making connections with the affected individuals can be challenging," says Shannon. "That's why it's so important to work with schools, churches, soccer teams, and in places where the community gathers together."

CVT is partnering with mutual assistance agencies such as the Organization of Liberians in Minnesota, the African and American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development, and the Minnesota African Women's Association. These and other associations provide general education and information to African immigrants and can provide a forum for educating individuals on the effects of trauma and torture and the rehabilitation process. CVT also has connected with several churches and housing complexes to identify individuals or families who can benefit from professional services.

New Neighbors/Hidden Scars is innovative in its plan to help the healing process. No other organization has pulled together existing resources to heal the wounds of torture in a community. It is designed to be a self-sustaining program that, when incorporated into the community, creates changes in both individuals and systems. With its successful development, it is a program that can be replicated across the state and nation and restore hope to many more survivors of torture.

Of Liberians living
in two Guinea refugee camps

93%

were victims of torture.

Source: Center for Victims of Torture, 2002

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.



Tales of the Self: Volunteer Andre Heuer

By Anne F. McCoy

ons, and crisis centers. But the story-telling community is an inherent part of his life.

Growing up in Erie, Pennsylvania, he used to sneak into the kitchen late at night to listen to the grownups talk. Driving through town or going on vacation prompted stories. Family, local history and religion were rich with stories stirring his appreciation of the oral tradition.

Many CVT clients come from oral cultures, where the pace of life is slower. When people from these cultures first meet, they ask each other about their relatives to see if they have friends in common. They take time to connect by talking with each other. In the United States, however, people may be considered rude for talking too much. Talking is seen as a waste of time. Some employers consider conversations between workers to be “time theft.”

Volunteer Andre Heuer led his first workshop for the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) in 2001. Since then, he has conducted several seminars for volunteers and staff, helping them to understand the importance of stories in their clients’ lives. Most recently, he facilitated a story telling event to collect the stories of staff, volunteers and clients to commemorate the 20 year anniversary of CVT.

In his professional life, Heuer has worked as a counselor in churches, pris-

When introduced, we expect quick answers to basic questions: What do you do? Where are you from?

In facilitating workshops, Heuer teaches that the process of telling stories from our lives is healing. When we take our experiences and formulate them into story, we gain perspective and distance. As teller of the story, we define our experience with a beginning, an end, an interpretation.

The story of an experienced trauma isn’t always the most important one to tell since dwelling on that story can be counterproductive. In his seminars Heuer shares that when we tell the stories about what we have achieved we can recover our strength. Those who torture deliberately try to break an individual’s sense of being whole, of belonging to a community; in remembering and telling their stories, clients regain themselves.