

# the storycloth

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## Healing the Youngest Survivors

When Dr. Andrea Northwood, CVT's director of client services, looks at her calendar and sees "Joshua" is scheduled for a counseling appointment, she prepares a little differently. That's because Joshua is not only a torture survivor, but also a preschooler. "When Joshua is coming in, I gather the toys we use during our play therapy sessions and get out crayons and paper," said Andrea, a licensed psychologist.

While the majority of clients CVT sees are adults, children like Joshua can also be survivors of horrific events. In the U.S. and in all of our international projects we

have served child and youth survivors, adapting techniques to their developmental levels.

"I believe young people are much more vulnerable to the effects of torture," said Andrea. "There is nothing more terrifying than that which you don't understand, and children don't have the same cognitive abilities or emotional coping skills as adults. They often can't organize what happened during traumatic events into a coherent story."

Events that occur during a "sensitive period" in child development can have very significant long-term effects. These vulnerable times

continue through adolescence.

"Some of the most traumatized people I've seen in my 15 years at CVT were adolescents when the torture occurred," said Andrea.

When a child is tortured, it affects the entire family. "The shame and the guilt of not being able to prevent a child from being tortured strikes at the heart of the parent's most important job—protecting their child from harm," explained Andrea. Sometimes other family members are dealing with their own torture experiences. In Joshua's family, his mother was savagely raped during war in their home country in Africa. As the family fled for safety, they were captured and abused by government authorities.

Very young children like Joshua don't always experience post-traumatic stress disorder like adults, but they display nervous behaviors, difficulties with developmental milestones, anxiety, fears, anger and difficulty separating from caregivers. Young torture survivors also have a much harder time regulating their

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*Fatima Jarrar, a local counselor in Amman, Jordan, used puppets in a counseling group for young children. The puppets helped capture the children's attention and address difficult topics such as anger and sadness.*

Client's name has been changed to protect his identity.

PHOTO © CVT



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

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## Letter from the Executive Director



Douglas A. Johnson

This fall we closed our project in Sierra Leone. One of CVT's first international initiatives, our work in Sierra Leone was in response to a brutal civil war that included widespread mutilations and dismemberment.

We helped 6,400 torture survivors reclaim their lives. More than 19,000 community members participated in awareness-building projects. We helped organize an indigenous mental health organization to carry on the work. And we trained over 100 Sierra Leoneans as mental health counselors.

Psychotherapist David Allan Harris trained many local counselors. He recounted this story:

"I remain in awe of the counselors I supervised, especially considering what they themselves had suffered ... They told me later of living in a community completely terrorized, where machine gun-toting combatants would push wheelbarrows piled with the body parts of dismembered corpses down village paths ..."

"Like everyone else in the area, this counseling team lived through these unspeakable horrors—not for a few hours, but for years. Even so, every one of them made it to the job each day. Most of the time, despite all odds, they worked tirelessly to help people navigate the torment of their memories—honoring their pain, that all might in time move forward, once again restored to meaning, to dignity, and hope."

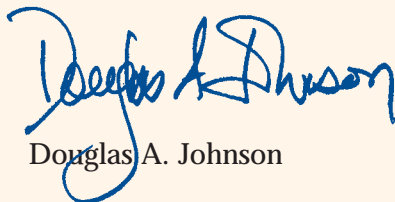
You can read David's story and others on CVT's Facebook page.

Our work in Sierra Leone began, as do all of our international projects, with an assessment conducted by our professional staff. These assessments cost \$15,000 and are paid for by individual donors who make gifts of unrestricted support.

As the end of 2010 approaches, I hope you will make a gift of unrestricted support. The funds we receive at the end of the year dictate the scope of our work and our impact in the coming year. Please give as generously as you are able.

Thank you for your compassion and your partnership. Together, we are rebuilding lives and restoring hope.

Sincerely,



Douglas A. Johnson

*CVT's work in Sierra Leone was funded by the United States Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and made possible through the financial support of USAID and the American people's support.*



PHOTO © KARLA WETHERBY

*In 10 years in Sierra Leone, CVT established a legacy of healing. These counselors that CVT hired and trained are building a local mental health organization to continue caring for torture survivors.*

# Healing the Youngest Survivors

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emotions, which often leads them to feel out of control and can escalate their distress and behavior problems.

“The most powerful intervention we have is with the parents,” said Andrea, who incorporates them into her work with a child. One of the best predictors of a child’s response to a traumatic event is the parent’s response. When parents are frightened or distracted by their own suffering, the child picks up on those feelings. But if they can provide a calm, loving environment then children can recover from traumatic experiences more quickly.

Caring for children and youth requires special techniques. Counselors who work with young children typically use play therapy. As a child plays with blocks, dolls, or other toys, the counselor watches for themes such as separation and reunion, re-enactments of traumatic events, dangerous situations and rescue. These themes reveal how a child is coping and processing their experiences and allow the counselor to work with the child. With older children and teens, activities such as drawing and drama allow them to process their experience.

## Working with Children Overseas

In our international projects, local counselors lead large group social activities for children and adults. The activities for children include sports, games, music or storytelling. If a counselor notices a child who looks overly sad or withdrawn, the counselor will provide information about CVT’s individual and group counseling services.

The counseling groups for youth

typically include drawing as part of the therapy. “In Sierra Leone, the children would lie on the floor of the healing huts as the counselors led therapy sessions involving drawing,” said Linda Nielsen, international clinical consultant. “Drawing, then talking about the drawing with the group provides a way for young people to express their feelings of fear, grief and anger. It’s often easier for them to share their experiences through both pictures and words.”

In our Jordan project, counselors are seeing high numbers of young people. Since January 2009, over 200 children under 18 years of age have received care from CVT. To heal these youngest survivors, we have developed several counseling groups, the youngest for six- to eight-year-olds. “It was a challenging task to make a group for children between six and eight years,” said Fatima Jarrar, a local counselor in Amman. “My colleague Maysa and I looked for bridges to bind us with the children and that they could use to express themselves.”

“For one session, we used puppets to help us capture the children’s



PHOTO © C.C. STROM

*Drawing provides a way for young torture survivors to express themselves and is frequently a part of counseling in both individual and group formats.*

attention,” explained Fatima. “The puppets also made it easier to address difficult topics.” In a session about loss, the counselors used a teddy bear in a story about war. The bear survived the war but lost some animal friends just as many of the children in the group had lost loved ones in war. In another session, the children made clay animals and talked about how their animals manage anger, sadness or fear. Through the project, the children learned about coping with feelings and events.

The Amman staff leads counseling groups for older children and teenagers, as well as for mothers and babies, and fathers with young children.

“It’s amazing how the children are willing to express themselves if we propose ways they can connect with us. They say a lot, and we have to listen well to find what they want to tell us by their way of playing, drawing or acting,” said Fatima.

With your support, we’ll continue caring for children and youth. By working with parents and children, we rebuild family relationships and restore hope for the future for the youngest torture survivors.

“Some of the most traumatized people I’ve seen in my 15 years at CVT were adolescents when the torture occurred.”

*Dr. Andrea Northwood,  
Director of  
Client Services*



PHOTO © STEPHANIE HYNES

# Restoring Hope through French Translations

What can a graduate student in French literature contribute to a torture rehabilitation center? If you are Corbin Treacy, it means providing an in-depth cultural and linguistic knowledge of French.

Last summer, Corbin assisted CVT on several projects, including translating documents used in French-speaking countries, primarily the Democratic Republic of Congo.

CVT's Congolese staff was desperate for French versions of our media policy, financial reports, grant applications, legal documents and organizational materials.

"As I read through the various documents, I was surprised and encouraged to find that in every area of work, CVT's focus is on restoring dignity and control to torture survivors," Corbin said.

For example, when translating the media policy, he was struck by the care taken to ensure clients interviewed by journalists are given full control. The scope, duration, and location of the interview are meticulously planned, so the client's wishes are always respected.

The need for ongoing translation is pressing. French is the common

Corbin Treacy is a PhD student in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Minnesota. Having completed his human rights fellowship and translation project, he is now working as a client services volunteer.



PHOTO © JENNIFER HARSHNER

language of 115 million Africans, many of whom have endured torture and war trauma for generations and look to CVT for hope and healing.

## Your Support Creates Healing and Hope

This year we are marking 25 years of rebuilding the lives of torture survivors. Because of generous donors like you, nearly 20,000 men, women and children have found the hope and strength they need to walk the path of healing.

Your support at the close of each year is particularly important because the gifts we receive before December 31 help underwrite our day-to-day operations.

The downturn in the economy these past two years has impacted all of us. Many of us have had to tighten our belts, and we at CVT have done the same. That's why it is so heartening that we've already heard from many of you this year.

But if you haven't had a chance to send a gift to CVT, please do so today. You can make a tax-deductible gift by check or credit card—or donate online at [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org). If you've already made a gift and you're

able to make another contribution, we are doubly grateful. Our clients are often told by their torturers that they are alone, that no one cares about them. But your annual support is a message of hope and encouragement.

Once again this year we are providing our supporters the opportunity to give *Gifts of Hope* as holiday gifts. Your friends and family are sure to appreciate knowing that a life is being restored in their honor. And you can be confident that your gift will be put to good use. When you give a *Gift of Hope* we'll send you cards that you can give to announce your gift.

Thank you for your generosity and partnership. We are grateful for your commitment to healing survivors and stopping torture worldwide.

*If you would like to discuss your options for year-end giving, including gifts of stock, please call Ashley at 877-265-8775 (toll-free) or e-mail [agotreau@cvt.org](mailto:agotreau@cvt.org).*

## Make a Difference in the Life of a Survivor

Your generous support brings healing to torture survivors worldwide. CVT welcomes all types of donations.

- **Monthly Sustainers** allow for ongoing planning and delivery of healing services.
- **Planned Giving** continues your legacy of support.
- **Gifts of Stock** support survivors while offering tax benefits to donors.
- **In-Kind Donations** of specific items improve the lives of survivors.
- **Tribute Gifts** celebrate events or memorialize loved ones.

Donate online at [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org), send a check to 649 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, or call 1-877-265-8775 for other ways to give. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.



THE CENTER  
FOR VICTIMS OF  
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Restoring the dignity of the human spirit

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