

# the storycloth

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## *Rebuilding Lives: Stories from Jordan, the Democratic Republic of Congo & Minnesota*

From humble beginnings in a small office in a St. Paul hospital, CVT has expanded its work around the world. In 25 years, we have healed more than 18,000 torture survivors from 60 countries.

Today, men and women who have endured torture find hope and healing at our clinics in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jordan and the United States. The stories of these four clients reflect the resilience and hope that make healing possible.

*Please note that all identifying names and details have been changed.*

### **Before the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, "Robert" lived a good life.**

His small business and farming activities provided a solid income for his family. Because he was a successful businessman, though, the military targeted and abused him. When Robert tried to stop soldiers from looting his home, he was severely beaten. He and his family fled to safety in Zambia.

After six years in a refugee camp, Robert and his family returned home. Overwhelmed by grief and memories of his

traumatic past, he isolated himself in his house. In spite of community and family support, he attempted suicide.

A CVT counselor, Jacques Cansa, began visiting Robert at home. Slowly, Robert began to talk about his past.

"During the counseling sessions he discovered how happy he was when he played with his children, when he prayed and when he was active working," said Jacques. After joining a therapy group, Robert began plans to rebuild his farm and the business he had



*Lumière Kasawa and Pascal Kimfwende counsel torture survivors at the CVT clinic in the DRC.*

PHOTO BY EDIE LEWISON

before the war.

"We have seen an incredible change in the economic, social and family activity of this man which shows his psychological recovery and the feeling of hope," said Jacques. "Every time we [saw him] he told us how happy and grateful he was for the work that we do."

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*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

Extending care to torture survivors who have suffered the unimaginable can help people experience happiness and joy once again.

This newsletter shares the stories of four clients. With effective care, many clients, like Robert in the Democratic Republic of Congo, can rediscover the happiness of playing with their children, actively working and being a part of a community. They can make plans for their future—like Alfred from central Africa who’s enrolled in college in Minnesota. Or Laela from Iraq whose self-confidence was revived.

We have touched the lives of more than 18,000 torture survivors. Since our founding nearly 25 years ago, the new lives that opened up for these individuals were made possible by your gifts. Thank you.

CVT will grow again this year. In addition to our centers in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Jordan, this year our overseas work will expand to Uganda, Zimbabwe and Syria.

Yet, vast numbers of survivors cannot receive care because of insufficient resources. With the number of survivors on the rise and funding for services falling further behind, your support makes a real difference.


On Christmas Day, Americans came face to face with imminent danger from terrorism again. In response, misguided voices have called for a return to torture policies. One cable television pundit said U.S. officials should deny the attempted plane bomber pain medication for his bad burns. One poll shows 58 percent of Americans “*say waterboarding and other aggressive interrogation techniques should be used to gain information from the terrorist who attempted to bomb an airliner on Christmas Day.*”

But we know that torture is ineffective in collecting actionable intelligence. In fact, it hinders our ability to convince people to come to us with valuable information. If the U.S. had kept in place policies of torture and cruelty, would the father of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the attempted Christmas Day bomber, have identified his son as a concern to the U.S. government?

The Executive Order that President Obama signed a year ago was meant to ensure that the United States would not go down that path again. CVT continues to educate our elected leaders to make sure that our nation does not return to policies that involve the use of torture and cruelty. You know you can count on us to stand up to the voices calling for a return to such shameful policies.

Thank you for speaking up against torture—wherever it happens—and for all that you do to help our clients regain their lives and experience joy again.

Sincerely,

  
Douglas A. Johnson

*January 22, 2010,  
marked the one-year  
anniversary of  
President Obama  
signing an Executive  
Order banning torture  
and cruelty.*



**Douglas A. Johnson**



PHOTO BY JAY PREMACK / www.jaypremack.com

# Stories from Jordan, the Democratic Republic of Congo & Minnesota

From page 1

The stories of these clients are typical of the 2,500 survivors we served last year. With the care of our mental health counselors, survivors do recover from their emotional pain. They reclaim their lives. Because of the ongoing commitment of supporters and partners in healing, we can continue the critical mission of healing the wounds of torture.

**When “Alfred” began receiving care at CVT, he was withdrawn and despondent.** “His immobilization permeated the room,” said CVT psychologist Dr. Andrea Northwood, who facilitated the men’s counseling group Alfred attended.

Alfred came to Minnesota from central Africa on a student visa to attend college. But the torture he endured for speaking

out against his government haunted him. Debilitated by depression, he withdrew from his classes. He applied for political asylum but the continual delays in processing his application exacerbated his feelings of hopelessness.



Dr. Andrea Northwood

Witnessing other men in his counseling group rebuild their lives, while he awaited approval of his asylum application, was discouraging. Yet his hope for a new life remained. The group counseling sessions reassured Alfred that he was not alone in his experience and emotions. He learned to manage his nightmares and anxiety.

When Alfred was finally granted asylum, a new life opened up for him. He started volunteering at a community organization that eventually hired him. He qualified for financial aid and enrolled in college again. Now, Alfred has become friends with other students on campus and is a leader in the local central African community.

**When “Roseline” arrived in Minnesota, she was so depressed and frightened** that she was unable to leave her house to apply for asylum. During her first appointment at CVT, Roseline sobbed uncontrollably. In follow-up meetings, she continued to be guarded, depressed and disengaged from people. She could barely speak.

“Roseline” sought help from CVT for the torture she endured after attending a political rally and supporting an opposition

candidate in her home country in West Africa.

“As with many of our clients, her despair, hopelessness and fear were palpable,” recalled CVT psychologist, Dr. Jean Choe.

But when Roseline joined the women’s counseling group, she began to make friends and trust others. She completed her GED certificate and participated in other educational opportunities in the community. She soon began volunteering in a hospital that



Psychosocial counselors Maysa' Al-Hmouz and Mariam Al-Salahat work at CVT's Amman, Jordan clinic.

**At her initial appointment in our clinic in Amman, Jordan,**

“Laela” cried hysterically. To hide her physical scars, she stood and sat in unnatural positions that worsened her pain. She had survived unspeakable physical and psychological torture, including rape, in her hometown in Iraq.

To relieve her depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and physical pain, Laela visited CVT’s clinic for counseling and physical therapy. After several months, CVT staff noticed changes. She began smiling. She learned how to ask for help and grew more self-assured. Less ashamed of her scars, she started moving more confidently as she continued to rebuild her life.

eventually hired her. “She regained her self-confidence and self-worth. She shared with us how she now has hope for the future,” observed Jean. “She began to brighten and come alive before our eyes.”

Roseline is now enrolled in college and has meaningful relationships with others. Her example inspires other women survivors. “She offers a lot of hope and resilience to other survivors and people she encounters,” said Jean.

PHOTO BY SAAD AL-GHOUL

# Volunteer Jim Callahan promotes legacy of giving and healing

On a winter evening in 2009, twelve CVT donors met for dinner in St. Paul with a special agenda—to discuss ways to promote charitable bequests to CVT and create a legacy of hope and healing.

Jim Callahan, a volunteer and long-time supporter, hosted the event. He had recently added CVT to his will and wanted to connect with other legacy donors who made the same commitment.

“Torture is not going to go away,” said Jim, “so CVT needs the resources to care for survivors for the long-term.”

Jim’s financial commitment to CVT grew out of witnessing

survivors rebuild their lives. As a befriender for more than 15 years, he accompanies clients to events and on outings to help them adjust to their new community. “Torture survivors need to be welcomed to our country. And if I can give them some help, that’s great!” said Jim.

Over time, Jim’s new friends open up and share aspects of their lives. “I took one client to the Minnesota state capitol and he said, ‘Oh, we could never do this in my country!’” Jim shared. He is enriched by his new friends’ stories from their home countries and lessons on their cultures.

“We’re always going to have



PHOTO BY C.C. STROM

*Retired music professor Jim Callahan is building a legacy of healing.*

torture survivors among us,” said Jim. “That’s why it’s so important for all of us to do what we can to relieve their suffering and build a permanent legacy of healing.”

## Your Annual Renewal Creates Healing and Hope

At the beginning of each year, we ask you to renew your commitment to healing the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities. Renewal gifts made early in the year have a big impact because they provide financial support for our work in the coming months.

Because of your generosity, we will care for over 2,000 torture survivors in 2010. In addition, renewal gifts will provide essential support for CVT’s public policy and advocacy work. Your gift will change lives; your gift will save lives.

So, when you receive your

renewal request please respond generously. And remember, you can always donate online by visiting [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org). Each gift to CVT is a gift of hope for a survivor like Laela, Robert, or Roseline, whose stories you read in this newsletter. Because of your commitment, these amazing people are walking on the path to peaceful and healthy lives.

Please call us toll-free at 1-877-265-8775 if you have any questions about your support of CVT or to make a gift over the phone.

**Thank you for your commitment to restoring the dignity of the human spirit.**

### 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 717 East River Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55455, or call 1-877-265-8775 for other ways to give. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.