

the storycloth

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Healing in Partnership: Collaborating to Provide Mental Health Care to Refugees

When Tao arrived in the United States, she hoped to leave behind the violence she witnessed in her war-torn Southeast Asian country. Yet after resettlement, she was isolated and lived in fear that violence could erupt again.

Every year, 70,000 refugees arrive in the United States. They flee homelands wracked by war and political violence. Like Tao, many are still traumatized by their experiences, even after settling in a more peaceful country.

Fortunately, Tao's doctor referred her to a group run by CVT and members of her refugee community. Here, she met other women who shared similar experiences and found support and understanding. The psycho-education group helped her understand how the war had affected her and reduced her fear of mental health services.

Too many refugees suffer from ongoing and untreated trauma symptoms, sometimes years after their resettlement. Clinics struggle to assess symptoms because of cultural barriers, stigma and the

lack of culturally-adapted mental health screening tools.

CVT's Healing in Partnership (HIP) initiative is changing that. HIP is a research, healing and training project developing a system of identifying refugees who need mental health care and then connecting them with the best resources. The project is a collaboration between CVT, the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Health, and four refugee communities in Minneapolis/St. Paul—the Somali, Bhutanese from Nepal, Oromo from Ethiopia, and Karen from Burma.

Screening Refugees

When refugees arrive in the United States, they typically receive a health exam to identify physical problems. While about half of all states provide mental health screening, most rely on informal conversation, making it less reliable. We know many refugees are torture or war trauma survivors and experience high levels of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Unfortunately, many of these newcomers do not receive the mental health services they need.

In collaboration with CVT, University of Minnesota faculty members Patricia Shannon, Ph.D., and Elizabeth Wieling, Ph.D., set out to improve the care for refugees, beginning with a screening tool to identify refugees who should see a mental health specialist.

After gathering information from the refugee communities, a questionnaire was created that can

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Ehtaw Dwe is working as a research interpreter and cultural advisor with CVT, a health clinic and community partner Karen Organization of Minnesota. Along with a graduate student, he administers the mental health screening tool to new Karen refugees.



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The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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 Chair

As I write this, CVT's search for a new executive director is well underway. Of course, finding a suitable successor to Doug Johnson will be a significant challenge. But thanks to his vision and leadership, this transition will occur while CVT has a strong foundation, talented staff and a solid financial position.



Patti Andreini Arnold

This past summer, the Board of Directors hired Schall Executive Search to assist in the transition process. Schall guided the board through a series of conversations to determine the skills and qualities desired in a new executive director. Building on the many talents of Doug, Schall and the board developed a position description, which is posted on our Web site (www.cvt.org).

It was determined that CVT's next executive director must be a strong advocate for human rights, a global thinker, and possess strong people and communication skills with deep compassion, humility and humor. This individual must be a strategic thinker with a high level of intellectual capacity and be team oriented, participatory and demonstrate deep respect for organizational values, creative leadership and excellent managerial skills.

We are now engaged in a national search, reviewing candidates and beginning the interview process. We expect to conduct interviews this fall and announce the new executive director in December. Our hope is that the new director and Doug will work together in January 2012 to ensure a smooth transition for CVT.

This type of leadership transition can be challenging for organizations and their stakeholders. I know for the board and staff, Doug's departure will be a poignant moment. But we look forward to this new era in CVT's growth, one that will continue advancing our mission to heal survivors and work for a world without torture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patti Andreini Arnold".

Patti Andreini Arnold
Chair, CVT Board of Directors

Under Doug's leadership, CVT has trained more than 300 paraprofessional mental health counselors in Africa and the Middle East, places where few mental health resources exist. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, these local counselors have helped nearly 4,000 men and women rebuild their lives. The CVT Moba staff pictured here participated in a teambuilding activity this spring.



PHOTO © CVT

Healing in Partnership

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be administered in a medical clinic. Questions include inquiries about nightmares, feelings of sadness or anger, as well as torture or physical threats.

The screening questionnaire was translated for each community. The translation process is very thorough to confirm questions will be understood by the refugees. Illustrations are included to demonstrate certain concepts. “The different cultural groups have their own ethnic expressions and experiences of mental distress,” explained Patty. “Some cultures use expressions such as ‘air in the brain’ while others talk about a ‘tired or weak heart.’”

The screening tool is now being offered at a few county clinics as part of routine refugee medical exams and will expand to other clinics. If the tool reveals that a man or woman has mental health concerns, they can be referred for further assessment.

Healing Refugees

In addition to identifying individuals who need mental health care, the project is helping refugees cope with their experiences and learn about U.S. health care. Research shows that psycho-education groups are important because they counteract isolation by reinforcing relationships and examples of resiliency. The seven-week groups address living in a new country; taking care of yourself and your family; effects of war stress; and loss, grief and the healing process. Like the screening tool, the curriculum for the groups is adapted to reflect the unique language and characteristics of each culture.

The groups are being led by

CVT Psychotherapist Abbey Weiss, Psy.D, L.P., with a community leader participating to assist with interpretation and cultural translation and a student intern who learns group leadership skills. The groups also reduce the stigma of mental health problems so those who need help will be more likely to seek it.

Training Leaders and Sharing Knowledge

Refugee leaders are the linchpins in communities of newcomers, providing guidance and support. To help these leaders strengthen their communities, CVT social worker and project manager Evelyn Lennon trains them on the physical and mental health effects of war and torture. As they see individuals suffering and begin to understand that assistance is available, the leaders help community members find the care they need.

To make the education and support groups self-sustaining and to encourage community involvement, CVT is also training cultural leaders at the community organizations to lead the groups. Refugee leaders learn how to facilitate dialogue to promote healing. Saw Morrison, an employment and social services program manager with the Karen

Organization of Minnesota, helped facilitate the first group for Karen refugees. “I have done a lot of social service work, but this group was filled with emotion,” explained Saw Morrison. “I see with the clients that I have to keep in mind their hearts and minds as I help them get their lives back on track.”

While the project is on-going, our collaborators are beginning to share their findings. Researcher Patty Shannon and her team have presented at conferences and are writing for professional journals to share what they’ve learned.

As the Executive Secretary to the Association of Refugee Health Coordinators, Ann O’Fallon works closely with refugee programs nationwide. “I know how important it is to screen for mental health early in the resettlement process,” said Ann. “This project is building a foundation that will make it easier to screen refugees and help them get the care they need quickly and efficiently. Receiving quality mental health care can make a world of difference in how men, women and children adapt to their new lives.”

Healing in Partnership is funded by the Huss Foundation, Asian Pacific Endowment of the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Foundations, The Saint Paul Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, and the Medica Foundation.

The refugee mental health screening tool asks simple questions to determine if further evaluation is needed. Questions are carefully adapted for cultural and linguistic differences.

American English version of a screening question:

“How many times in the last month did you feel worthless?”

Karen version of a screening question:

“How many times in the last month did you have a weak heart?”

Ted Bowman: Volunteer and Donor

Once you move through the doors at CVT, you get caught up in the culture,” said Ted Bowman, a volunteer for nearly five years and a table captain at the Restoring Hope fundraising breakfast.

Ted is an educator, author and consultant who specializes in grief, loss and disruptive events. Using his professional knowledge, Ted teaches other CVT volunteers how multiple losses affect torture survivors.

He also teaches essential listening skills to volunteers who work with survivors so they know how to respond when a survivor tells a story. “We contain many stories,” explained Ted. “Torture survivors may share some things with a

volunteer, and if that volunteer responds in a particular way, then the client may not be as open to a therapist.” Through Ted’s work, CVT volunteers learn how to be supportive to survivors on their healing journeys.

As a table captain last year, Ted invited his friends and colleagues to the Restoring Hope breakfast. “It was done wonderfully in the space of an hour,” said Ted, “and was respectful of everyone’s time.” The testimonies clearly explained CVT’s work of rebuilding the lives of survivors, he explained, so his friends “saw the link between their values and the values of CVT.” Ted decided to host a table again this

year because of his financial and volunteer commitment to CVT. “If the financial resources aren’t there, it’s hard to maintain the services.”



PHOTO © TOM BOWMAN

Join us at the Restoring Hope breakfast at 7:00 a.m. on October 13. Visit www.cvt.org or contact Rachel Hughes at 612-436-4859 or rhughes@cvt.org for more information.

Planning for Hope, Healing—and Your Future

In today’s uncertain economy, we understand donors are looking for creative ways to continue supporting CVT’s mission of hope and healing—and at the same time, protect their own financial well-being. An increasing number of our supporters are choosing to establish charitable gift annuities.

Charitable gift annuities date back to the 19th century and allow donors to make a donation and receive a guaranteed lifetime income—sometimes as high as 9.5%. Donations can include cash, stock or other assets. The income is based on the donor’s age and is especially favorable to older

individuals. A fixed annuity can be very reassuring for individuals in their retirement years.

Funds from annuities support CVT’s efforts to rebuild the lives of torture survivors in the United States, Africa and the Middle East. Because of your support, survivors are finding the hope and courage they so desperately need to overcome the legacy of torture.

If you’d like to learn more about charitable gift annuities or other giving options to support CVT, please contact Rachel Hughes, Individual Giving Officer at 612-436-4859 or rhughes@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, 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.



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