Breaking the Cycle of Trauma in Uganda

Helping survivors of the infamous Lord’s Resistance Army rediscover joy and hope

No one should ever experience what happened to Joan—especially at the age of ten. But that’s how old she was when the so-called Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) came to her village in northern Uganda. After forcing her to watch the murder of her family, they took her away, held her prisoner and brutally tortured her whenever she refused to participate in their atrocities.

At an age when her days should have been spent at home with her mom and dad, laughing and playing with friends, and going to school, Joan was suffering horrors beyond our imagination.

And even though she was eventually able to escape her captors and make her way back to her village, her trauma was far from over. That was partly because of the terrible nightmares that refused to let her find peace. But it was also because when she returned to her community, she was shunned. The people with whom she had longed to be reunited for all those years rejected her because of what she’d been forced to do by the LRA. Joan had escaped her captors, but she was unable to escape her past.

Sadly, Joan’s story is all too common. There are an estimated 50,000 survivors of the LRA struggling with the same demons as Joan. To meet their unique needs, the Center for Victims of Torture began providing healing care in Gulu in 2015. Our direct care is centered around a ten-week group counseling program that allows people like Joan to meet other survivors in a safe place—in an environment where they can finally find the acceptance they need. After the ten weeks, Joan’s entire demeanor had changed. She was no longer withdrawn, she talked actively with those around her and laughed freely. She started to shed the shame that had dominated her life.

In Gulu we are also taking on another heartbreaking legacy of the LRA’s decades-long campaign of kidnappings: a generation of children born in abduction. Almost all girls (see page 3)
Letter from the President and CEO

Dear Friend,

Like you, I wish CVT could reach every single person struggling to recover from torture and other grave human rights abuses.

But that’s not something any single organization can do alone, especially with violence and conflict intensifying in so many regions around the world and continuing to fuel the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War.

With the compassionate support of friends like you, CVT will always provide direct care to as many survivors as we can, while also working to end torture around the world and hold perpetrators accountable. But the terrible scale of the problem demands that we also leverage our expertise through trainings, technical assistance and partnerships with other humanitarian organizations.

For example, as the lead article in this issue of The StoryCloth describes, our work in Uganda includes partnerships with a university in Kampala and local civil society to help those organizations build capacity and provide desperately needed healing care to even more survivors of the notorious Lord’s Resistance Army.

We have similar partnerships in most of the countries where we work. Besides dramatically expanding the impact of your support for CVT, there’s a synergy to these partnerships. When CVT exchanges ideas with a local organization about approaches to caregiving—especially while accounting for cultural, historical and political differences—it strengthens both parties. Our work with local groups in Uganda, for example, has given us valuable insights into the particular needs of LRA survivors there.

In a major development, the U.S. Agency for International Development recently selected CVT to operate a five-year capacity development project that will generate ten global partnerships with torture rehabilitation programs focused on organizational development, clinical skill-building, monitoring and evaluation, and security.

Capacity building is also an important part of our advocacy work. In one initiative, for example, our New Tactics in Human Rights Program team is providing training on advocacy, resilience and staff care to human rights defenders who are on the frontlines of the global struggle to build a better tomorrow.

All of this puts you at the center of a growing movement to bring survivors the care they so desperately need and build a world without torture—and we could not be more grateful.

Sincerely,

Dr. Simon Adams
President and CEO
Driven by Compassion

Empathy and generosity are at the core of Kathleen Knepper’s approach to life. They guide her daily interactions with others, and they explain her unwavering support for CVT.

Not too long ago, Kathleen traveled with CVT to our healing center in Amman, Jordan. While talking with survivors there, she was especially moved by the story of one client from Iraq. After losing both his wife and young child, he felt hopeless with nothing to live for. But that was before he found CVT—and the kind of compassion and support necessary to restore his sense of optimism and purpose.

That’s why Kathleen supports CVT: its unique role in providing lifesaving services to people who have survived things most of us can’t even imagine. Kathleen knows that her financial generosity means there will be someone there to help people like that man from Iraq.

As the world continues to face the worst refugee and asylum seeker crisis since the Second World War, Kathleen recently decided to increase her support. She understands that sending an extra donation now will go a long way in helping CVT provide services to those who are most in need and she hopes that others will be motivated to do the same.

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(from page 1)

who were abducted by the LRA were raped and experienced sexual violence. Many became pregnant and gave birth while still captive. Those who managed to escape, like Joan, returned to a world that shunned them and their children. Struggling with their own challenges, many of these young mothers were unable to raise their children and turned them over to relatives.

Some of those children born in abduction are now teenagers and young adults. Rejected by both family and community, it’s easy to understand why many exhibit self-destructive and antisocial behavior—often turning to street gangs and violence. This is a terrible example of something we see all the time: a cycle of trauma being passed from one generation to the next.

To help end that cycle in Uganda, CVT is partnering with an organization called Camboni Samaritans to help this “lost generation” of children choose a better path. Camboni Samaritans is providing housing and rehabilitation for individuals trying to get off the streets and CVT is providing counseling. We’re in the early stages of this life-changing initiative, but we’re very encouraged by the response so far.

While CVT is providing as much care directly to survivors of the LRA as we possibly can, the demand for rehabilitative services is far beyond the capacity of any one organization. That’s why in Uganda we’re also developing the capacity of our friends and colleagues.

First, we’re training mental health counselors at partner organizations to help build their ability to extend care to survivors of the LRA. These mental health counselors are also able to obtain a Diploma in Trauma Counseling through Makerere University in Kampala, following the completion of a two year-long training curriculum and supervision sessions. And, second, CVT is mentoring masters-level psychology students at Makerere University through an internship program.

What was stolen from Joan can never be returned: her childhood. But, with our partners in Uganda and the caring support of friends like you, the Center for Victims of Torture can help Joan and so many others recover from their trauma and rediscover joy and hope in the future.

This project is supported in part by Together Women Rise and CVT is grateful to be their Featured Grantee for the month of March.
How Monthly Giving Can Benefit Both You and CVT

Rather than giving to CVT once a year, or several times throughout the year, more and more of our supporters choose instead to join the CVT Circle of Hope by having a smaller gift automatically charged every month to a credit card or transferred electronically from a checking account. Monthly giving ensures CVT has a reliable source of income to provide care at our Healing Centers and respond quickly to emergencies, but it also has important benefits for you:

- You never have to wonder when your CVT membership expires—because, as a monthly giver, your membership is always current.
- Your contributions are made electronically, with complete security, so you don’t have to deal with any paperwork or remember to send your contribution.
- Since your total contribution is spaced out over the year, it makes budgeting easier for you (and CVT).
- By cutting down on postage and processing costs, even more of your contribution will go directly where you want it to—helping survivors heal and bringing us closer to a world without torture.

As a member of the Circle of Hope, you will receive an annual statement in January with all of your contributions for the previous year. And, of course, you can change, suspend or cancel your giving at any time. To join the Circle of Hope, visit cvt.org/donate.

Other Ways You Can Help Survivors Rediscover Hope

Here are a few more ways you can help even more survivors like Joan heal their wounds, rebuild their lives and rediscover joy and hope in the future.

Employer-Matching. Many employers will match charitable giving from their employees, doubling or even tripling their contributions. Contact your employer’s human resources department to find out whether this is a way you can leverage your impact.

Legacy Giving. Many donors who do not have the resources to make substantial gifts during their lifetimes find it possible to be extraordinarily generous through their estate planning. A gift of this kind will extend your legacy of caring while also offering potential financial benefits to you and your loved ones. There are a variety of options available to you to make a legacy gift to CVT, including bequests through your will or living trust, naming CVT a beneficiary of your life insurance or retirement plan, making a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA and setting up a charitable gift annuity.

For more information on any of these options or other ways to make a legacy gift to the Center for Victims of Torture, please contact Laura Kuhlmann at Lkuhlmann@cvt.org. Of course, you should always consult with your attorney, accountant or financial planner to ensure that your gift fits your personal situation.

If you wish to make an immediate gift, visit us online at www.cvt.org, send a check to 2356 University Avenue W, Suite 430, St. Paul, MN 55114, or call (612) 436-4808. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing the wounds of torture.