The CENTER for VICTIMS of TORTURE

CVT Overview

Restoring the Dignity of the Human Spirit

The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) is dedicated to healing survivors and ending torture. By extending rehabilitative care to survivors, developing the capacity of institutions and individuals, and advocating against torture and in support of human rights, CVT works toward a future in which torture ceases to exist and its survivors have hope for a new life. CVT was founded in 1985 as the first torture survivor rehabilitation center in the United States and just the third internationally.

Mission Statement
Our mission is to heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities and to end torture worldwide.



CVT VALUES: **HOPE**, HUMAN DIGNITY, INTEGRITY, EQUITY, COLLABORATION

What is Torture?
Torture is the intentional and systematic infliction of physical or psychological pain and suffering in order to punish, intimidate or gather information. Torture is immoral, ineffective and makes us less safe. It is also illegal under international law. Torture is, however, a highly effective means of oppressing populations. Torture destroys leaders, disintegrates opposition and terrorizes communities. It creates cultures based on fear.

Torture results in a complex set of physical and psychological problems for its survivors: Chronic pain in muscles and joints from being bound, hung or confined to small places like cages. Balance and mobility problems, often from being beaten on the soles of the feet or lower legs. Sleep disorders including sleeplessness, sleep interruptions and intense and incessant nightmares. Deep depression. Severe anxiety. Frequent thoughts of suicide. Fortunately, with sensitive and professional care, survivors can heal from their wounds and reclaim their lives.

CVT'S Work in the World
Over more than 40 years, CVT's work has evolved to focus on four primary areas:

Rebuilding Lives and Restoring Hope
CVT was founded and originally developed its first clinical programs in Minnesota, where our professional staff includes physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, community educators and interpreters, complemented by volunteer occupational, physical and massage therapists. We extend rehabilitative care to individual survivors; assist members of their families; provide training to mainstream health and human services professionals, as well as attorneys, refugee leaders, law enforcement officials and others; and refer survivors we can't help to other care and service providers in the community. The team in St. Cloud, Minn., uses a holistic model of care that incorporates psychotherapy, community education and professional interpretation to address the unique needs of clients in a safe therapeutic space.

Elsewhere in the United States, CVT extends rehabilitative care to refugee torture survivors and asylum seekers in Clarkston, Georgia. In addition, we extend destination case

management to families and asylum seekers at the Southern border via our Proyecto Mariposa initiative in Arizona.

Internationally, CVT has offices in Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Uganda and additional project sites around the world. We work in refugee camps and communities where there are large numbers of survivors, employing a model whereby professional staff hire, train and supervise paraprofessional mental health counselors. Increasingly, physical therapy is a key component of CVT's international projects and we aim to build capacity that will endure beyond the duration of CVT's presence.

At our project in Nairobi, Kenya, we extend care to refugees and asylum seekers from across East Africa, with a particular emphasis on LGBTQ+ individuals escaping persecution. We also work in Uganda with victims of atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army. In Tigray, Ethiopia, we extend care internally displaced people as well as refugees from neighboring countries. In Amman, Jordan, we provide resilience training and psychosocial support to partner organizations and survivors of conflict.

Developing Capacity
Helping develop the capacity of organizations that deploy health care professionals and humanitarian workers is an area of growth for CVT.

The National Capacity Building project, which operates in the U.S., builds clinical skills and organizational capacity for partners who extend care to torture survivors. The New Tactics in Human Rights program promotes enhanced strategic and tactical planning in the human rights movement, broadly defined to include economic, social and cultural rights in addition to civil and political rights.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research
CVT is widely known for the quality of our program evaluation efforts, as we document significant improvements in our clients' mental health and functionality. Our Healing Hearts project, serving ethnic Karen survivors from Myanmar (Burma), was a five-year, $3+ million randomized controlled trial (RCT) that documented improved health and functioning outcomes, and lower health costs, among patients who received CVT's specialized mental health and case management services in a primary care setting (when compared to a control population that received "treatment as usual"). Another RCT on Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive Integrated Massage Therapy completed in 2026, showing significant improvements for clients for chronic pain and mental health symptoms. In addition, CVT has documented a 27% torture prevalence rate among refugees, asylees and forced migrants who live in the United States, indicating there are likely more than 1.3 million torture survivors in the U.S.

Policy and Human Rights Advocacy
CVT's federal policy advocacy centers on appropriations to government programs that fund torture survivor rehabilitation in the U.S. and internationally, and national security and human rights issues. In all of our policy advocacy work, we leverage the credibility gained through extending care and rehabilitation to torture survivors into effective campaigns that generate broad and bipartisan political support.