

The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

THE
storycloth

MAY 2013

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2 • WWW.CVT.ORG

Asylum: A Lifeline for Healing from Torture

The worst thing about the asylum process is the waiting,” said CVT social worker Evelyn Lennon. Evelyn, along with CVT’s other client services staff, accompany torture survivors as they seek long-term safety in the United States by supporting and counseling them through the asylum process. In our St. Paul Healing Center, nearly two-thirds of all clients are seeking asylum—some waiting up to four years for an answer. Until asylum is granted, though, survivors face the

risk of being forced to return to the countries responsible for their torture.

For survivors of torture who fled their homes seeking protection in the United States, a grant of asylum status offers a lifeline toward the safety and stabilization that is the first step in their holistic healing process. Due to major problems in the asylum system—including detention, extended delays, broadly defined bars to asylum, and rigid deadlines for filing—CVT’s clients often find the process itself to be

re-traumatizing. Without the assurance of asylum, survivors’ healing process is prolonged.

CVT psychotherapist Abbey Weiss is working with one survivor we’ll call “Jean Paul” whose asylum hearing is scheduled for 2016. Unfortunately, he is not alone in his long wait because of the backlog in the immigration courts. “He feels like he’s in a different type of prison,” said Abbey of the young man who fled a central African country after being tortured for his involvement with a political opposition group. “He was a college student when he was tortured and he’d like to go back to school. But as an asylum-seeker, he doesn’t qualify for student loans or grants. He is making progress in his healing, but the asylum process makes survivors’ symptoms worse and makes the suffering last much longer.”

Obtaining asylum is exceedingly complex and can be filled with legal twists and turns. “The process is intimidating and confusing,” said Evelyn. “It can be dehumanizing” for survivors who have been

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For survivors of torture who fled their homes seeking protection in the United States, asylum offers a lifeline to healing. CVT clients often find the process to be re-traumatizing.

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Restoring
the Dignity of
the Human Spirit

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Letter from the Executive Director

Our cover story this issue features one of the difficulties survivors face to healing after torture: Challenges in the U.S. asylum system.

The burdens to asylum place survivors in a terrifying limbo, uncertain if they will be returned to the country responsible for their torture.

Removing these barriers to healing is one reason why CVT has an established presence in our nation's capital. Through our Washington, D.C. office, we advocate for the protection and care of torture survivors and an end to torture.

In addition to asylum reform, we continue to call for the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on how the CIA came to use torture and cruel treatment in counterterrorism efforts. The report is the best opportunity to date to secure accountability for past abuses and work to prevent a recurrence.

And through our Washington, D.C. office, we're working to increase understanding about the importance of torture rehabilitation in any response to humanitarian crisis involving torture. The worsening conflict in Syria is one of the most immediate examples of this need.

Without any outreach, the CVT Jordan team reports a waiting list of 400 Syrians brutalized by torture and war and a waiting list of Iraqis struggling with severe trauma.


While we're actively seeking funds to expand our care, the scale of the crisis requires the significant resources of the international community (including the United Nations and wealthy nations) to fund skilled mental health care for torture survivors.

I hope you will join us by becoming an advocate for survivors purposefully silenced by torture. You can do that by signing up for emails from CVT on our website at www.cvt.org.

On a wistful note, CVT will say goodbye to the Minneapolis house in August. For the last two years, survivors have received care at our St. Paul Healing Center. This summer, we'll consolidate non-clinical staff in one location to better serve our growing organization.

Thank you for the compassion, support and generosity you show to CVT and the survivors we serve.

Sincerely,



Curt Goering
Executive Director



Curt Goering

This summer, CVT will move out of the Minneapolis house, which once served as a healing center for torture survivors.

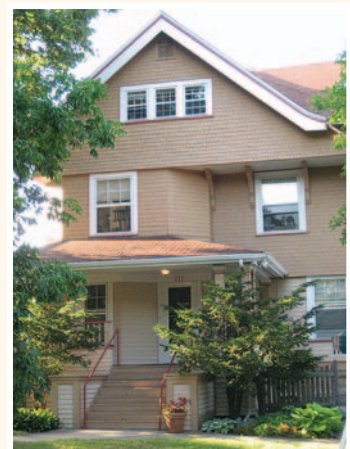


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detained in jails or prisons.

Individuals who wish to receive asylum must file the necessary forms within one year of entering the country. Then, they tend to wait six months—or perhaps longer—for an interview with an asylum officer. If their case is before an immigration judge, the process can take years.

While waiting for their interview or hearing, survivors must produce a written testimony describing their torture. They are expected to provide evidence that corroborates their story, such as a birth certificate, enrollment in a university or proof of membership in a political party. For those who lived in rural areas or developing countries, there may not be birth records or other legal documents to verify a survivor's story. Survivors often flee with very few belongings and are now thousands of miles away from required documentation, trying to adapt to a new culture and struggling with depression, flashbacks, nightmares and overwhelming fear. While they are working to heal, the burdens of documenting their torture can be overwhelming for many survivors.

At the initial interview, the asylum officer questions the survivor. Survivors must be prepared to tell the most painful secrets of their

torture to a complete stranger. Those who have a hearing before an immigration judge may be forced to tell these secrets in open court. They may be aggressively cross-examined by an attorney from the government who is trying to expose holes in the story. Often for women survivors, this includes describing being raped or sexually assaulted. “To be questioned about your story is disturbing,” said Evelyn. “The story must be credible and match the written testimony because any inconsistency can be a reason to deny or delay granting asylum.” As a coping mechanism, survivors may tell their story with little emotion or omit an event that causes them pain or shame. Yet this may lead to doubt about the validity of the story.

While survivors wait months or years for progress in their cases, they begin to rebuild their lives in small ways. “The survivors learn coping mechanisms for this waiting period,” said Evelyn. “They learn techniques that help them relax or sleep.” CVT social workers and volunteers help survivors find hobbies, learn how to use the library, visit community centers or find a place of worship. If they don't already know English, they'll start learning. They might begin volunteering or perhaps working. “Most clients want to be

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“The worst thing about the asylum process is the waiting.” Currently CVT clients are waiting about three years for an asylum hearing.

PHOTO © CARIN ARAUJO / WWW.SXC.HU

busy so they don't have to think,” said Evelyn. “For many, their spiritual life helps sustain them during the waiting.”

Currently, CVT clients are waiting about three years for an asylum hearing. At that time, the survivor must again tell their story. Often the judge will rule orally at the conclusion. “I've seen survivors fall to the floor in the hearing in joy and in despair,” said Evelyn.

Once a survivor is awarded asylum, they must wait one year before applying to be a permanent resident and reuniting with their family. But they can begin planning for a life without the fear of having to return to their homeland and torturers. Clients will spend the time working and saving for plane tickets for family members. They have hope and can actively work towards a positive future.

“The happiest times we share are when clients bring their families back to meet us,” said Evelyn. “They can show their families the Healing Center and the people who helped guide them through recovery.”

Bill and Margaret Hunt: Supporting CVT with an IRA Rollover



PHOTO PROVIDED BY BILL HUNT

Bill Hunt is one of CVT's very first supporters. In the 1970s, he worked on the University of Minnesota campus and knew the founders of CVT. Nearly 30 years after CVT's founding, Bill and his wife, Margaret, found a creative and easy way to support CVT with an IRA rollover.

"I checked with my financial advisors and made a list of charities I wanted to support," said Bill.

"My advisors sent me some papers to sign and that was it. It's very easy to do. It's not for everybody,

but it made sense for us and our taxes."

Retired for 15 years, Bill and Margaret lead very full lives. He writes and helps with local home-school students. Margaret is a painter and teaches painting. They both are supportive of their friends and family who are aging in the community and need help with transportation or other tasks.

While Bill and Margaret support many organizations, CVT is close to their hearts. "I think CVT is very well managed and it's important to

take care of the people who are tortured," said Bill.

The IRA Charitable Rollover allows individuals over age 70½ to make distributions from their IRAs directly to nonprofit organizations without incurring the taxes that would apply to a normal withdrawal from their IRA accounts. If you'd like to support CVT with an IRA rollover, talk with your financial advisor or contact Rachel Hughes at rhughes@cvt.org or 1-877-265-8775.

Planning for Hope and Healing—and for Your Future

You have already made a big difference in helping the Center for Victims of Torture to heal the wounds of torture worldwide—and we are deeply grateful for your generosity and commitment.

CVT continues to hear from supporters who are looking for creative ways to support our mission—including bringing hope and healing to Syrians who have survived torture and severe war-related atrocities, and who are now streaming into CVT's healing center in Jordan in great numbers. An increasing number of donors are establishing Charitable Gift Annuities (CGA) to support our work.

A Charitable Gift Annuity is a type of planned gift. In return for a transfer of cash, marketable securities or other assets, donors receive a guaranteed lifetime income. CGAs can be set up for immediate income or for deferred payments until a certain age; the income is based on the donor's age and is especially favorable to older individuals. For example, the annual annuity rate for an individual age 70 is about 7%; for individuals age 80 it's about 10%.

If you'd like to learn more about Charitable Gift Annuities or other planned giving options, please contact Rachel Hughes at 1-877-265-8775 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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