



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

THE
storycloth

AUGUST 2017

VOLUME 27, ISSUE 3 • WWW.CVT.ORG

Respecting Culture in the Healing Process

When you say the words “counseling” or “psychotherapy” to Westerners, they probably envision some clinical room with a desk and chairs, perhaps a nice watercolor hanging on the wall. But counseling can happen more or less anywhere.

In Uganda, for example, group sessions occur in a hut. It has a beautiful fresh-thatched roof and everybody sits on the ground. The hut doubles as the local church. It is a very familiar setting for the people. So we adjust to them. For them, it is not unusual to talk with

people sitting in a circle on the ground; it is customary. We perform intakes and follow-ups sitting in the grass outside in the camp.

Our work with interpreters is a key element. It’s important to build up a strong relationship and a therapeutic alliance with the interpreter. We collaborate together to translate words in a culture that doesn’t have the same expression of emotions. In some countries, there are few words or no words for a certain emotion (for an example in Arabic, “stress” and “tension” are the same word).

And sometimes it is better for us to use metaphors because images can be clearer.

We take in consideration that in many countries, time is precious. People do not invest in activities if they are not useful—women, in particular. Most of their days are dedicated to work from early in the morning, so coming to our session without receiving any material support must be useful. Otherwise, they would not come.

This is the final proof that the CVT healing process works. People continue to participate in sharing and listening. They continue to talk. They know they will not receive anything else except talking therapy. So something happens—a change occurs, small at first and then more profound. And that is the value of our work. There is nothing as beautiful as this change.

By Luca Modenesi, CVT clinical advisor for mental health.



PHOTO © SYDNEY STEAD

Sometimes it is better for us to use metaphors because images can be clearer.

Restoring the
Dignity of
the Human Spirit

INSIDE

- 2 Letter from the Executive Director
- 3 The Community Outreach Ripple Effect
- 3 Parenting While Healing
- 4 CVT’s Healing Reach in 2016

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Recent developments at the federal level are a mix of bad news and good for survivors of torture and war atrocities.

The Supreme Court's partial reinstatement of President Trump's travel ban and the prohibition of refugees entering the country for 120 days once again threw thousands of survivors of torture into a situation of uncertainty and fear.

The travel ban is based on President Trump's false portrayal of victims as perpetrators, and his false assertion that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program cannot properly vet persons who come to this country as refugees. The fact is that refugees are the most thoroughly vetted people who travel to the United States from other countries. And CVT's research shows that up to 44 percent of refugees are torture survivors.

The president's budget proposal for fiscal year 2018 calls for massive reductions in foreign and humanitarian assistance, a scheme that runs counter to both American values and our national security. One casualty of the president's budget would be funding for the U.N. Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, which supports more than 100 torture survivor rehabilitation centers worldwide—including CVT. For programs in some parts of the world, that funding is the only available source of financial support.

CVT's healing projects in Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya and Uganda could be affected, due to the budget's proposed decrease in funding for Migration and Refugee Assistance programs, which supports our work.

But in a piece of good news, the Survivors of Torture program in the United States was not cut in the president's proposed budget. It helps fund CVT's healing centers in Minnesota and Atlanta, as well as 33 additional torture survivor rehabilitation programs across the country. This funding program also supports CVT's National Capacity Building project, which organizes technical assistance and training for torture survivor programs in the U.S.

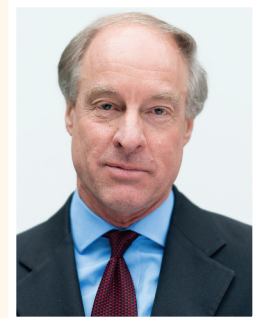
It's important to remember that the White House budget proposal is just that, however—a proposal. The final budget Congress passes will be very different and your input to your elected officials will be vital to influencing the outcome.

I will keep you up to date, and we'll let you know how you can help ensure that funding remains available to rebuild the lives and restore the hope of people who've suffered in ways that are scarcely imaginable. Thank you for being our partner in healing, and for all you do.

With my thanks,



Curt Goering
Executive Director



Curt Goering

The Community Outreach Ripple Effect

Mebratu*, a middle-aged Eritrean man, fled to Ethiopia after being imprisoned in a tiny underground cell. It was so dark he could not see his cellmates. They were given so little water, sharing it with the others was a matter of life or death. He said that once he escaped and had begun his new life in the refugee camp, a CVT counselor noticed him and started saying hello when their paths crossed. Over time, he quietly reached out a hand of kindness to Mebratu and one day asked, “Why are you alone? Come to CVT.”

Mebratu went through the 10-week group counseling cycle and said, “Before CVT, I never talked about my experience. I kept it to myself for years; it was hurting me for all those years.”

Outreach by clinical staff in the refugee community is key for bringing torture survivors to CVT Ethiopia for care. CVT uses several tools to reach out within the refugee community to survivors like Mebratu, including mental health awareness and education sessions, as well as sessions where staff talk to the community about rehabilitative care. In addition, CVT counselors and staff who live in the refugee camps are connected to social workers and caregivers who let them know when someone needs the kind of healing care CVT brings.

The effectiveness of these forms of outreach is clear in the numbers of survivors who come for care at CVT Ethiopia. In 2016, CVT saw

645 clients in two camps, Adi Harush and Mai Ayni, with an estimated 2,580 family members benefiting from our clients’ improvements.

These outreach methods have been in continuous use since 2013 when CVT Ethiopia first opened its centers. In addition, CVT’s community education and outreach make progress in correcting the misperception about mental health that can be found in the refugee community, that CVT is a place for people who are “insane.” With CVT’s intensive community outreach, there has been a change in attitude and people now see that CVT is for healthy people who have survived traumatic situations.

Osman*, another former client at CVT Ethiopia, put it simply, “CVT helps us changing from non-life to life.”

*** Names have been changed for confidentiality and privacy.**



PHOTO © CVT ETHIOPIA

Parenting While Healing

Several CVT clinicians shared insights on clients’ experiences of taking on the healing journey while also raising children. This is a composite story.

There is pain after torture that hides in your joints. Sometimes it is a dull small pain, sometimes it goes away completely. Sometimes there is nothing you can do, the pain is too great. The pain takes your breath away. Even walking to the market becomes impossible.

On top of the pain comes the feeling of guilt for not being able

to provide for your children. On top of the guilt is the stress caused by the financial, educational and health concerns of your family while facing an uncertain future.

The children know that something is wrong. You do your best to hide it from them. You do your best to shelter them from the cruelties of the world. When you are alone, this is when you cry.

If you are a parent and you are reading this, you know there is another side to this story. Your children will be the only thing that can bring you back from the

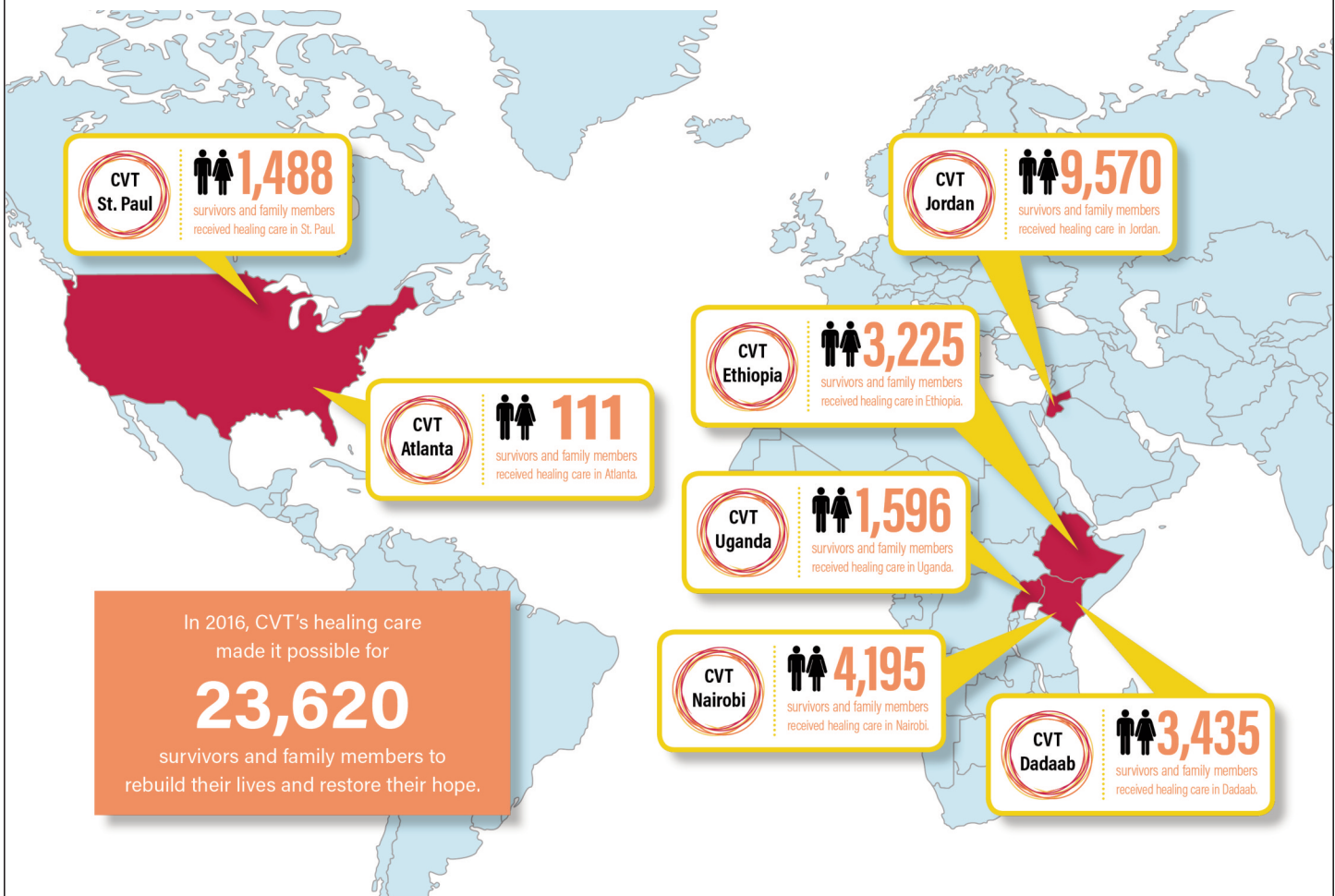


PHOTO © AGNES MONTANARI

darkness. You get out of bed wanting to help yourself for the sake of your children. This motivates you. The maturity they show when helping you cook and bathe their younger brothers and sisters gives you

(see page 4)

CVT's Healing Reach in 2016



Parenting While Healing

(from page 3)

strength. The intuition they show sensing your sadness and anxiety will let you know that you are raising a caring kid.

You will learn that focusing on providing for the needs of your children can be helpful and can give a sense of purpose to life. After what you and your family survived, purpose might not otherwise exist. This thought scares you and causes you to hold your children close.

You'll meet other parents in CVT's group counseling sessions. You'll listen as they share their challenges at home openly and realize that you are not alone in your experiences. During the 10 weeks together, group members really get to know each other, begin to trust again, and for you it is the first time that you feel part of a new community.

The pain in these moments seems absent. The thorns of stress,

guilt, anger and shame in your heart will slowly dissolve. The memories of torture and warfare you fled to find a safe place for your children are fading, and as those memories fade they make room for new ones. You'll join community groups and make plans to meet outside of CVT to support each other.

You will tell your counselor at CVT more about your children than you will about the pain caused by torture, and you'll feel the pain in your body making more space for what has kept you alive this entire time: *love*.



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

2356 University Avenue W, Suite 430
St. Paul, MN 55114
www.cvt.org

© 2017 Center for Victims of Torture All rights reserved.
Please contact CVT for permission to reproduce this newsletter or any part of it.

