

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/helping-clients-step-light-healing>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Teresa Longole is a psychosocial counselor at CVT Kalobeyei.

In my work with survivors of torture, my first priority is that I want to bring about changes for clients. Their healing is the most important thing because they are trying to achieve a new way of walking through their lives, a different journey. And after coming to us for care, I see the changes in their lives. Negative thoughts now appear positive. Clients have new expressions on their faces.

My work is to enable this change from negative to positive, from trauma to adoption of a positive outlook. In so many cases, this is what I see with clients. And that is what motivates me.

Before I came to CVT, I worked with elderly clients in Kakuma for about five years. I was in the reception center, which is a focal point for all refugees who are coming into the camp, and I particularly cared for the older newcomers. In that role, I distributed non-food items to refugees and worked with them as they were first brought there. I connected them with a number of resources, agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which could provide assistance. It was my job to identify those who needed medical care and had any special needs. I also helped with finding shelter and basic provisions for new arrivals, such as blankets, mats and other items.

However, it was when I came to CVT that I learned about the care that is needed for those who have survived torture. This has allowed me to learn many things about life and clients and the community in a much wider context. Working with survivors, I've been exposed to many different people, tribes and situations this is exposure I could never have had at other organizations. I worked closely with clients and communities and started building a good rapport.

I found that torture survivors had a lot of challenges and difficulties in life. Because of their trauma, they needed more assistance in some areas. Many clients could focus on moving from a negative life to a positive life if they were given the tools and some personal objectives. Beginning to work in this way was a good move for me.



My role at CVT is a bit wide, and it has had to change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In ordinary times, we do assessments at first with clients when they come to us to seek help. We build rapport as part of the assessment, and we also go into the community doing outreach and mobilization to help people learn about our service and come to us. Now with restrictions from the pandemic, we use phones and limited physical interactions with greater distance and also put on face masks in order to reach out to new clients. And in a positive and hopeful development, the therapeutic remote clinical journey of treatments, where we are holding individual sessions with clients online, is working out great.

When new clients come to the center, we do an assessment session with them to see if they need immediate care and to see if they meet our criteria. We arrange groups of 12-13 clients according to tribe, to gender or other considerations, and then we work with them over ten sessions. After the groups complete, we follow up with each client after 3, 6 and 12 months to see how they are doing. Each client is important to me. The questions I ask myself about every client's journey to recovery are: Has she improved? Has she fallen back?

From the very beginning, clients matter to me. At the assessment, you can see the emotion in their faces, and often you can see a change beginning just from that assessment conversation. So many clients have very powerful changes from the first session when they may arrive feeling suicidal, without friends, crying. That is when you work to establish trust.

I remember a client who came to the first session who was just gloomy. He couldn't look directly at me or anybody in the session. This got a little better, but it was very rare for him to speak, ever. In the early sessions, we focus on grounding and exercises that facilitate the process of grounding. As the sessions progress, we use the concept of the River of Life, helping clients understand how their lives had positive moments and negative moments. I saw that this client had a hard time sharing. He needed time to grieve. He needed time to feel his anger. Over the sessions, I had to humble myself and remember: My target is to let him achieve this. I cannot do it for him.

Finally, he shared his story with the group this was in Sessions 5 and 6. I remember the moment he started speaking out in a session. He was giving voice to that thing that was inside him; you could see this voice of gloominess was finally ready to come out. There is tremendous power in this action of mental health healing. This was when he really began to change.

Later when I met him for the first follow-up session, I didn't believe my eyes. He looked healthy and strong. His clothes were clean and ironed. He said, 'You're really doing something here at CVT. As a counselor, I felt like I had put on black goggles before. Now seeing him after the counseling, I could see him. No more goggles.'

He told me, I thought I was the only one with this basket of problems. But now I know youre seeing my truth. Now I can pray. Before I came to CVT, I was going to kill myself.

And he was the one who called me to schedule the follow-up session he thought maybe I wouldnt call him again. He asked Why havent you called yet?

Clients tell me, At CVT, youve done something great. You can see it in their faces, you can see the smile. The change from CVT is real; the change affects clients lives, and its very interesting, very interesting. Im so happy to be part of this. We provide coping skills, grounding exercises, all the care that helps. And now the clients also have community. Before CVT, most clients say they had no one in their lives. But now they have friends. Its like they have crossed over from a dark form of death into life.

There is so much that clients are getting from CVT, and there is so much that I am, too. I have seen so much in working with survivors of torture, and now Im very focused. Im in a position to help. Im pursuing my degree in psychology and will continue to gain new skills. Hope is the heartbeat of a person who has survived torture. We help them move away from the darkest image of trauma to thoughts that are healthy and clear. We are giving to people who truly need it.



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