For many of us, November is often synonymous with sharing a meal and celebrating with friends and family. At SURVIVORS, this is year-round. People are often pleasantly surprised by the kitchen at SURVIVORS. A kitchen is a warm, welcoming, and communal place in many different cultures. It is in our kitchen that many clients feel at home for the first time since they were forced to leave theirs in their home countries. Additionally, in our kitchen is a refrigerator that clients may treat as their own. Each time clients come to SURVIVORS’ office they are offered a seat at the table in our small kitchen, a bite to eat, a hot cup of coffee, and a sense of belonging.

This fall, San Diego Unified School District’s Community Service Association funded a new refrigerator for SURVIVORS’ clients to use. Having a functioning refrigerator is crucial to helping our clients lead healthy lives. We provide donated fresh food and beverages for clients to eat and drink at the office or to take home to their families. Our new refrigerator allows space to store perishable foods so that clients can have fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, and dairy products every week.

Approximately 73% of SURVIVORS’ clients are political asylum seekers. Political asylum seekers enter the U.S. legally, seeking safe refuge; however, they are not eligible for many of the benefits and resources available to refugees. Asylum seekers often cannot work which results in extreme financial hardships. Thus they live at or below the federal poverty level and usually cannot access basic necessities such as food and hygiene items while they await their asylum hearings - a process that can take months and often years.

Clients appreciate the atmosphere of the kitchen at SURVIVORS. Many clients wait for their appointments in the kitchen while enjoying a snack. For some, the food is life-saving; for others, it’s a place to meet new people, make friends, and rebuild trust.

Mission Statement
Survivors of Torture, International:
• Facilitates the healing of torture survivors and their families;
• Educates professionals and the public about torture and its consequences;
• Advocates for the abolition of torture.

Photo by Gabriel Garcia Marengo

SURVIVORS knows my heart. There is no need to worry. I know that I’m not alone.”

~ SURVIVORS’ client from Africa, who wished to remain anonymous

Kevin Faulconer presented proclamations and certificates of recognition to SURVIVORS. Similarly, there continues to be an increased interest in SURVIVORS. This year, SURVIVORS held 33 Journey to Healing tours. By being aware of the underserved and often invisible population of torture survivors, the 359 people who attended tours this year became a part of our welcoming community in San Diego. There were also several private tours for organizations and companies, such as Catholic Charities and Hecht Solberg Robinson Goldberg & Bagley LLP.

SURVIVORS is grateful for our community of supporters that consistently show that you believe in the right to rehabilitation for torture survivors and their families. SURVIVORS is able to further its mission to assist torture survivors because of the devotion to care of this community. SURVIVORS hosts Journey to Healing tours twice per month. The schedule and how to RSVP are on page six.
Executive Director Kathi Anderson Elected to California State Advisory Council on Refugee Assistance and Services

SURVIVORS is pleased to announce that Kathi has been elected to serve on the California State Advisory Council on Refugee Assistance and Services (SAC) for a three-year term. Elected to fill one of two vacant, public seats on the council, Kathi is the fourth San Diegan representative to this 15-member board. The purpose of the SAC is to advise the California Department of Social Services on issues pertaining to refugee resettlement in California. Specifically, the board is tasked with providing guidance to enhance health services, income assistance, employment services, and acculturation services for California’s resettled refugees. As someone who once resettled refugees herself, Kathi is excited to be joining her colleagues who were elected from different agencies, ethnicities, levels of expertise, and geographic locations, yet share a common passion for serving and promoting refugees, especially those who are torture survivors. Kathi attended her first SAC meeting at the 2017 Refugee Summit, held in San Diego in August. Congratulations, Kathi!
Belle’s Story

Belle* is a young Congolese woman referred to SURVIVORS in 2016 by her immigration attorney for a medical affidavit and a psychological evaluation to support her asylum case as well as for other mental health services to treat the “heavy depression” and “head sickness” she began experiencing after her torture. While still living in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Belle was targeted for her defense of minority groups being oppressed by ruling party officials who took power following DRC’s second civil war.

Soldiers broke into her family’s home one evening to gang-rape her at gunpoint and then force her to watch as they gang-raped her sister. Belle was so traumatized by her torture experiences that she vomited throughout her medical and psychological evaluations “because I had to go to the hidden place inside me where I try to forget what happened to me.”

After her evaluation and affidavit, Belle received additional mental health services such as weekly individual in-home therapy, monthly group therapy with other survivors, and bi-monthly psychiatry services at SURVIVORS. During her first appointment, Belle reported and presented with severe depression and trauma symptoms such as daily crying spells, difficulty concentrating and recalling short-term information, reduced appetite with weight-loss, nightly nightmares, insomnia, intrusive memories of her rape, increased startled responses, daily headaches, and difficulty breathing “when I have stress,” and racing uncontrollable anxious thoughts “about what will happen if they send me back. I cannot go back.”

After participating in holistic treatment at SURVIVORS for the past year, Belle reports and displays major symptom reduction: “I still have troubles but it’s much better than before. I’ve learned so many things and now I can sleep and concentrate more... the biggest improvement is with my depression. I don’t feel afraid anymore.” Belle completed several ESL courses and is now able to have English conversations unaided by interpreters. She no longer experiences panic attacks or difficulty breathing, and her appetite “is normal again.” Belle also reports feeling “ready to start English medical terminology classes so I can work as a nurse again. I was a nurse for a long time back home and when I came here I never thought I could do it but now I’m ready – it is my dream. I’m looking into having my degree from home evaluated, too. I have hope.”

* Name has been changed to protect client’s identity.

Organizations That Financially Support SURVIVORS who gave October 1, 2016 - September 30, 2017, and make healing stories like Belle’s possible. Thank You!

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Clients, like Belle, rebuild trust during their healing group session.
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Many thanks to our supportive donors!
Because of you, survivors are rebuilding their lives. We are grateful. We apologize for any errors or omissions and extend our gratitude for support that may not have been recognized. (Please contact us at 619-279-2400 with corrections.)

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Common Myths and Misconceptions about Torture Survivors

People who have been tortured have had their lives radically changed. Most torture survivors are resilient individuals, many of whom were professionals and leaders in their homelands. There are several myths and misconceptions that we hear about torture survivors. Below, we list several of the most common.

**MYTH: Torture Treatment is unnecessary.**

This myth combines several misconceptions into one. First, people often think that torture is a method of the past, that it only happens in isolated incidents, or that there are fewer torture survivors in our community due to fewer refugees being resettled in the U.S. Second, there are those who believe that torture survivors spontaneously heal once the torture is over, that they can “get over it” without professional mental health support, or that survivors simply cannot heal at all. These myths could not be further from the truth.

- SURVIVORS has served more than 2,000 torture survivors in the past 20 years. Torture survivors are often diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When left unaddressed, PTSD may be triggered at any moment and manifested as physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and physical disability. Unaddressed trauma affects individuals, families, and communities. Once addressed, people with PTSD are able to manage their mental health symptoms and go back to school and work.

- Torture is a human-induced trauma causing survivors to lose trust in other people. Rebuilding trust requires holistic care and intensive support from trained mental health professionals. With 20 years of carefully developed expertise, SURVIVORS, the only accredited torture treatment center in San Diego, is better prepared than ever to address complex issues and to provide hope. Torture survivors – both adults and children – are incredibly resilient and have the capacity to bounce back from adversity when they have the support they need from all of us.

**MYTH: Children and grandchildren of torture survivors are not affected by torture.**

Torture never exists in a vacuum. If untreated, it trickles down to the next generation, who may not even know or understand why their families were forced to flee their home countries. We strongly believe it is essential that children of torture survivors receive appropriate care in order to stop intergenerational trauma. Cajon Valley and Grossmont High Union School Districts have asked us to provide emotional support to their students. Last semester, we assisted a record-breaking 325 children.

**MYTH: Torture is physical, like what we see on TV and in the movies.**

Torture can be physical, sexual, or psychological - in the form of death threats or being forced to witness the torturing of others. Psychological torture is the most common type of torture that our clients have experienced and takes the longest to heal from.

**MYTH: Sexual torture is only against women.**

Survivors of sexual torture are not only women; men and children are also targeted. Perpetrators may choose their victims arbitrarily or specifically on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation, or other aspects of identity.

- Cases against men are often underreported due to stigmatization.
- In many countries, heteronormativity and homophobia are still prevalent, so much so that torturing sexual minorities is ordered, defended, or condoned by state authorities. In countries where homosexuality is prohibited, survivors are often unable to report their cases to the police or to seek medical care.
- The impact of sexual torture extends beyond immediate bodily and psychological pain. Given the multi-faceted consequences of sexual torture, holistic rehabilitation is essential for survivors to regain their health and to form relationships.

_Raja’s Story_

Raja* is a middle-aged female from Syria who was targeted by the Syrian government officials due to her belief in atheism and non-adherence to Islamic law. She endured years of harassment and threats by family members, community members, and police due to her refusal to comply with laws such as mandatory veiling. On one such occasion, Raja was detained in a state prison where guards and police beat her head and face with their hands and weapons and then raped her. Once she was released, she knew she had to leave Syria. When she arrived in San Diego, she was detained at Otay Mesa Detention Center. Her immigration attorney referred her to SURVIVORS to receive a psychological evaluation and a medical affidavit to support her asylum case. While detained, she received letters of support from SURVIVORS’ staff with messages of hope and encouragement; she later reported that “the letters were all I had. I knew where I could go if I got out of that place.” After her release from the detention center, Raja contacted SURVIVORS to mitigate her constant intrusive memories and terrifying nightmares of her torture – “I wake up screaming and my roommate wakes up too.” She was unable to sleep, concentrate, eat, or trust anyone she met. She felt worthless and hopeless.

Raja began individual therapy and psychiatry at SURVIVORS in 2016, and is now reporting feeling much better. She is working fulltime in a job “I really like,” is living independently “where I’m happy and it feels like my place,” no longer experiences anxiety and hypervigilance about her safety, has experienced a major reduction in frequency and intensity of nightmares, has regained a normal appetite, no longer experiences hopelessness and worthlessness, has learned “many coping skills,” and is now fluent in English and successfully participating in college courses to advance her career in information technology.

Raja has experienced such a significant improvement in her symptoms that she asked to discontinue therapy as she feels “confident” and “safe” to manage her remaining symptoms using only her psychotropic medications and the coping skills she has learned at SURVIVORS.

* Name has been changed to protect client’s identity.
Carmen Kcomt, director of the Legal and Social Department of La Maestra and former SURVIVORS' client, nominated Kathi for this prestigious award because of her longtime dedication in working with an invisible population – torture survivors. “It was an honor to share Kathi's and SURVIVORS' story with such a distinguished group of business leaders to whom public service and giving back to the community are core values,” says Carmen. In the nomination Carmen spoke about Kathi's vision and leadership, and how much Survivors of Torture, International meant to her personally based on her experience as a former client and as an asylee from Peru.

SURVIVORS' Board Member Elizabeth Lopez Named a KPBS Community Hero

SURVIVORS is excited to share the fantastic news that our nominee, Elizabeth Lopez, was selected as the KPBS community hero for the topic of immigration. An immigration lawyer who also serves as secretary on SURVIVORS' board of directors, Elizabeth is the executive director of the Southern California Immigration Project. She actively represents close to 80 asylum seekers detained at the Otay Mesa Immigration Detention Center in San Diego as well as the regional detention facility in Calexico in Imperial County. Thanks to Elizabeth for her tireless efforts on behalf of arguably some of the most vulnerable members of our community – detained asylum seekers, many of whom are torture survivors from around the world. Congratulations to Elizabeth for receiving such a well-deserved award!

Survivors of Torture, International
P.O. Box 151240
San Diego, CA 92175-1240
Change Service Requested

The Strength to Survive. The Power to Heal.

Join us on an upcoming Journey to Healing tour to learn how we are helping to rebuild torture survivors’ lives.

- Wednesday, Dec. 6      5:30 - 6:30 pm
- Tuesday, Dec. 19        8:00 - 9:00 am
- Thursday, Jan. 4        5:30 - 6:30 pm
- Wednesday, Jan. 17      5:30 - 6:30 pm
- Tuesday, Jan. 30        8:00 - 9:00 am

For more information go to www.notorture.org or call 619-278-2400.

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