Advocating for Torture Survivors

Every year, SURVIVORS and human rights organizations across the world mark June as torture awareness month. There has been increasing awareness of the ever-growing population of asylum seekers requesting safety in the United States. It is estimated that more than half of these asylum seekers will have experienced torture. As the only torture treatment center in San Diego County and our proximity to the busiest border crossing in the world, it is important that our expertise and services be available for all who need and want them. Therefore, we have centered ourselves in critical conversations throughout our community and strengthened strategic partnerships.

As the issue of asylum gains a wider audience, we attend diverse events, meetings, and conferences to advocate for torture survivors. This includes Executive Director Kathi Anderson – in her role as the vice-chair of the California State Advisory Council on Refugee Assistance and Services – acting as a moderator for state-wide meetings that focus on the mental and physical healthcare needs of asylum seekers and torture survivors. We also attended a press conference led by Governor Gavin Newsom who highlighted the support of the state to address the critical needs of asylum seekers. We are proud to advocate for the urgent need for services and assistance for asylum seekers on state-wide platforms.

We had already seen a significant increase in the need for our services over the past three years. Comparing our data from the first quarter of 2017 to the first quarter of 2019 reveals an increase in requests for our services. We completed 10 medical and psychological evaluations in the first quarter of 2017 as compared to 49 in 2019 during the same time frame. Similarly, the number of detained clients (at intake) increased from four in the first quarter of 2017 to 56 in the first quarter of 2019. In quarter one of 2017, SURVIVORS served 18 new clients; whereas, in the first quarter of 2019, 65 new clients were served.

We are ignited to advocate for this community and to keep the critical conversation alive to ensure torture survivors and their families receive the help they deserve.

Clients Gain Peace Through Creativity

Our offices are decorated with art created, and then lovingly donated, by our clients. Over the years, SURVIVORS’ clients have made numerous pieces of art as part of their Healing Club art therapy sessions.

Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the creative process to improve a person’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Art is transformative and can give ‘voice’ to what cannot be communicated in words.

For the April Healing Club, Senior Mental Health Clinician Rachel Mahoney chose mandala art for our clients. “In many cultures, mandalas are used to symbolize and explore the self. The word mandala is Sanskrit for circle or completion, so clients were supported in creating mandalas as a way to meditate by using lines and colors to represent their dreams, suffering, hopes, experiences, and communities,” Rachel explained. A client said he used the color green to “represent new life and moving forward, and I left blank spaces because I still have a lot of experiences left in my life.”

It helped our clients “focus and concentrate, build their self-esteem, and learn relaxation techniques,” said Clinical Case Manager Nance Lovell. Our clients find art meaningful. As a client reflected, “Coloring helps me forget everything I have going on in my life…. I feel at peace.”
Qualified Charitable Distributions Made Simple

SURVIVORS has served over 3000 torture survivors in 22 years because of the generosity and charitable spirit of our donors, volunteers, and supporters.

Recently, economists have been speculating that the new tax laws might adversely impact charitable giving. But charitable giving has never been simpler due to Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) and their ability to help meet philanthropic goals.

QCDs are a direct transfer of funds from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) and can be counted toward satisfying required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year. In addition to the benefits of giving to a charity, such as SURVIVORS, a QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income, unlike regular withdrawals from an IRA. Equally important, SURVIVORS doesn't pay income tax on the distributions we receive. So your entire donation will be used by SURVIVORS to fulfill our mission.

Each year, donors age 70 1/2 and older can transfer up to $100,000 from their IRAs to any qualifying charity including SURVIVORS. The donor can also establish a non-advised designated fund and can select charities in advance that will receive annual grants for a term-of-years or on an ongoing basis. In order to qualify for the QCD, the donor cannot maintain an advisory capacity over the fund once it's established (i.e., the donors cannot add or remove selected charities, or change the distribution plan). Furthermore, QCDs can also be used to pay the premiums on gifts of life insurance, the proceeds of which will be directed toward the non-advisory fund after the donor has passed on.

Giving these assets to SURVIVORS, instead of taking RMDs as income, may enable donors to avoid certain disadvantages that can come with a higher annual gross income from increased Medicare premiums or self-employment. Since QCDs are not subject to percentage limitations on charitable deductions, QCDs are an ideal strategy for donors who have reached the upper limit of their charitable deductions or who do not itemize deductions.

QCDs are a win-win charitable donation that benefits both you and SURVIVORS’ clients.

Live Well San Diego Public Health Champions

The Live Well San Diego Public Health Champion Awards recognize extraordinary achievements by individuals and organizations in areas of public health service that protect and promote the health of the local population. The award honors the role of private/public collaborations that advance optimal health and wellness in the county’s diverse populations.

SURVIVORS was proud to be one of only two organizations to receive this year’s Live Well San Diego Public Health Champion award. Sasha Moore, former volunteer and interim medical case manager, explained in her nomination of SURVIVORS, “(SURVIVORS)... is an amazing team that gives hope to those who have forgotten how to hope, heals those who have been psychologically and/or physically tortured in ways that most cannot even begin to comprehend, and saves lives – every day.” SURVIVORS feels privileged to champion public health by helping torture survivors and their families heal while fostering a welcoming community in and around San Diego County.

Our greatest reward is to see our clients, after utilizing the healing services we offer, go on to become functioning and productive members of the community. “I want to volunteer and be helpful in my community and San Diego,” one of our clients from the Middle East shared with us after he had succeeded in rebuilding his career and life in San Diego.
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THE SURVIVOR

Individual & Family Financial Supporters who have October 1, 2018-May 31, 2019. Thank you!

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Hilary Naylor
Elizabeth O’Brien
Katie O’Malley
Sharon Payne
Katrina Pimental
Terry Pimental
Marian Privett
Dena Piemmons & Jerry Maddoff

Organizations That Financially Support SURVIVORS who gave April 1, 2018-May 31, 2019. Thank you!

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Bruce M. Abrams GLBT Torture Survivors Fund
Business Complete Solutions
Cajon Valley Union School District
California State University, San Marcos - Homie Up!
Calvary Lutheran Church, Solana Beach - Mission Endowment Fund
Change A Life Foundation
Christ Presbyterian Church, Carlsbad
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Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Diego
United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement
William H. Donner Foundation

Thank you!
After spending 22 years in the field, our organization is highly regarded in the international arena as an expert on the subject of torture survivors; the majority of whom are asylum seekers. In April, SURVIVORS was pleased to welcome United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT) Human Rights Officer Maria Luisa Bascur for a visit.

SURVIVORS and the UNVFVT have a long-established relationship. We have been a recipient of funding since the late 1990s to support our healing services. This visit gave SURVIVORS an opportunity to not only discuss the organization’s existing programs and outcomes, but also to help strengthen the bonds between our organization and one of the chief international leaders in the torture treatment community.

SURVIVORS, the only accredited torture treatment center in San Diego County, also acts as the eyes on the ground for the UNVFVT representative, who expressed particular interest in discussing and gaining our insight on current U.S. immigration policies and the flow of newcomers into San Diego County.

An Opportunity for International Engagement

An Opportunity for International Engagement

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<tr>
<th>Client Demographics</th>
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<th>Number of Psychological &amp; Medical Evaluations</th>
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SURVIVORS has seen a significant increase in the need for our services over the past three years. It is critical that all torture survivors can access and receive the help they need at SURVIVORS. New clients are referred to us by attorneys, church leaders, community members, mental health providers, and others.

Laura Vanderpool
SURVIVORS Executive Director

Number of New Clients
Number of Psychological & Medical Evaluations
Number of Clients Detained at Intake