**COVID-19: The Focus Is Still on Client Healing... Even While Socially Distanced**

As the world responds to the widespread effects of COVID-19, SURVIVORS continues to serve our clients in the most impactful ways possible.

1. **User friendly, client-focused video platforms and one-on-one support for virtual therapy and case management.** “We have been supporting our clients to help them become more computer literate, for example, teaching them how to access telehealth,” says Winona Garcia, clinical case manager.

2. **Access to resources remains difficult for our clients who are some of the most vulnerable residents of San Diego.** Many in the hospitality industry have had their work hours cut and they are not eligible for most benefits. Also, as of August 2020, the waiting period for asylum seekers to apply for a legal work permit in the United States was increased from 180 to 365 days. Garcia adds, “Imagine waiting a year to work and having no other stable means of financial assistance.” SURVIVORS has increased support to clients by enlisting volunteers to drop off basic needs packages of food, hygiene, cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment.

3. **For our newcomer students in the Cajon Valley Union School District, news of widespread losses as a result of COVID-19 has “retriggered traumatic grief and increased anxiety and irritability,” says Jack Brennan, children and family therapist.** Our clinicians have proactively responded by utilizing creative virtual art therapy, interactive card games, and trauma-informed activities to support the social, emotional, and developmental needs of vulnerable students.

4. **We continue to connect with our community and valued donors, remotely.** “Since March, we’ve hosted more than 256 guests on virtual Journey to Healing tours to foster a welcoming community for our clients and their families,” says Katrina Pimental, community relations manager. As we hosted our first-ever virtual fundraiser, our generous underwriters allowed 100% of donations to go directly to client services.

5. **For clients who are held in detention centers as they wait their immigration court hearings, this hardship can be especially difficult.** SURVIVORS continues its Cards of Hope project by sending handwritten letters to clients to remind them that they are not alone.

...and Even When in Mexico

SURVIVORS is located less than 20 miles from Tijuana, Mexico, the busiest land border crossing in the western hemisphere. The changes to U.S. asylum policy immediately affect our clients and demand a swift response. The Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) or “Remain in Mexico” policy implemented in June 2019 has impacted thousands of asylum seekers. Due to MPP paired with COVID-19 risk factors, those seeking legal, humanitarian protection in the United States, some of whom are torture survivors, were left without our type of assistance. As a result, SURVIVORS felt compelled to provide services to asylum-seeking torture survivors at the Tijuana border.

Our recent partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) allows us to expand our services to ensure that torture survivors are assisted at the border. We have found that asylum seekers who have immigration lawyers and professional psychological and medical evaluations have an approximate asylum grant rate of 80%. With the support of the UNHCR, we are now able to provide remote psychological evaluations to clients in Tijuana. We will expand to providing in-person evaluations as soon as it is safe to do so. “The “Remain in Mexico” policy may keep asylum-seeking torture survivors “out of sight” but they are never “out of mind” at SURVIVORS. Additional info on MPP available at: [https://www.pbs.org/newshour/tag/remain-in-mexico](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/tag/remain-in-mexico)
THE SURVIVOR

Increasing Awareness Benefits Survivors

Though torture research is available worldwide, physicians in the United States are often unaware that their own patients have been tortured. While San Diego is home for many torture survivors, a lack of awareness in healthcare of how to recognize torture survivors could mean that many may be left untreated.

For this reason, SURVIVORS’ pro bono medical evaluators, Dr. Lydia Grympa and Dr. George Longstreth, took the initiative to write an article concerning a relatively unknown (in the U.S.) physical sign of torture to be published in March in The American Journal of Medicine titled “Foot Torture (Falanga): Ten Victims With Chronic Plantar Hyperpigmentation.” The article describes falanga as a repetitive and blunt trauma inflicted on the soles of the feet in a form of torture. Falanga can immobilize victims, limiting their walking abilities for up to 10 weeks and can cause wounds that are recognizable for a decade. The authors note that “knowledge of this finding should also help physicians who care for tortured patients”. Publications of this nature assure that all torture survivors can be better served with trauma-informed healthcare practices. We are grateful for these physicians who seek to contribute to healing of torture survivors locally and worldwide. Article now available online at PubMed with PMID #32941848.

Supporting Our Local Legal Service Providers

Supporting survivors of torture requires a vast network of community members and multi-disciplinary partnerships. When our clients seek legal assistance, it is often necessary to disclose personal details regarding the extreme trauma and unimaginable events that led to fleeing their home. In the legal profession, it is normal to experience secondary traumatic stress, or vicarious trauma, while engaging empathetically with a client. Jim Friedrich, a contracted licensed clinical social worker of SURVIVORS, said, “The symptoms experienced by these workers often mirror what the victims of torture have described and can truly be traumatic.” In response, the UNHCR made it possible for us to partner with a Minnesota-based sister organization, The Center for Victims of Torture, to provide resiliency support and training for legal service providers in San Diego focusing on:

1. Balancing boundaries with the demands of the profession;
2. Understanding and processing feelings of helplessness; and
3. Fostering long-term sustainability in the field of immigration.

To whole-heartedly serve our clients at SURVIVORS, it means that we promote self-care for those who are in service roles themselves. This partnership makes it possible to invest in the health and well-being of our colleagues in the legal profession. Friedrich reported, “The response of immigration attorneys to these training sessions has been strong and they are quite responsive to the opportunities being offered through the group process and individual coaching.” SURVIVORS knows this training is mutually beneficial for our clients and their advocates.

Eighty-six cents out of every dollar raised goes directly to SURVIVORS’ programs. Support SURVIVORS through alternative giving and everyday activities. Visit notorture.org/donate to learn more.

SURVIVORS is an IRS 501(C)(3) non-profit and an IRC-accredited torture treatment center. We are eligible to receive tax-deductible gifts to the extent allowed by the law. Our Federal Tax ID Number is 33-0743869.
The Survivor

Thank you!

Healing Society Members who have made five-year pledges of $1,000 or more per year.

Jan Gallo
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Lydia Grympa & Bob Oakley
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We apologize for any errors or omissions and extend our gratitude for support that may not have been recognized. Please contact us at 619-278-2400 for corrections.
SURVIVORS is proud to announce that our strong financial health and ongoing accountability and transparency have earned a 100/100 rating from Charity Navigator’s new Encompass Rating System. This score designates SURVIVORS as an official “Give with Confidence” charity. Since 2001, Charity Navigator has been America’s largest unbiased and trusted independent charity evaluator, with more than 8.5 million annual users. We hope this will introduce our work to new supporters who can help us advance our mission to help torture survivors and their families rebuild their lives.

Charitable giving information free of charge is found here: [https://www.charitynavigator.org](https://www.charitynavigator.org)

Notice of Blackbaud Breach

It is our responsibility to notify you that our database vendor, Blackbaud, has informed us of a data security breach. Blackbaud discovered and stopped a ransomware attack before any encrypted files were breached. SURVIVORS was not an affected party. Sensitive data, such as credit card information, is not stored on our Blackbaud database. We do not believe you need to take any further action. As a reminder, we do not solicit donations via phone calls so be aware if you are telephoned by someone claiming to be us, especially if they don’t specifically say they are with “SURVIVORS of Torture, International.”