



Artisans Beyond Borders photo by Valarie Lee James

Carrying heavy burdens TRAUMA HEALING AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Finished Manta cloths from Mexico, hand-washed and dried on the line by Tucson's all-volunteer Friends of Artisans Beyond Borders.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

(Matthew 11:28)

As Christians, we are called to meet needs and provide comfort for the suffering. How can we do that in a way that is sensitive to individuals and communities who carry the heaviest burdens—those who have experienced deep and painful trauma?

Trauma is caused by many factors, including violent conflict and domestic violence. It can affect both an individual and a whole society. Unrecognized and untreated trauma perpetuates cycles of abuse in families and commu-

nities. In order to break these patterns, the work of relief, development and peacebuilding must include psychosocial support.

In this issue of the *Washington Memo*, you will read about MCC supported projects in the United States, Nigeria and D.R. Congo that are successfully responding to trauma, and about the importance of prioritizing funding for psychosocial support in U.S. foreign assistance. ✨

Our ministry toward a holistic recovery and healing

by Charles Kwuelum



Human development that considers the well-being of the whole person requires that the root causes and triggers of conflict and violence in communities are addressed. This includes addressing structural and systemic injustices, treating various forms of trauma, building resilience and providing skills to manage the dynamics of traumatic experiences.

A lack of programs to help individuals and communities bounce back or function after serious trauma often perpetuates cycles of violence, preventing peace and stability.

Historically, the emergence and evolution of trauma has informed creative responses. One modern response is Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR) from the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. This framework grew out of the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States. STAR provides a model for group processing of trauma, psychological first aid, and individual and group healing and recovery. It has been

used and adapted in diverse contexts globally after violent conflict, emergencies and other shocks.

Trauma informed and trauma response frameworks are constantly evolving. Responses toward psychosocial well-being are as old as humanity itself. Programs like STAR work to increase resilience, help individuals bounce back and function, and build on one's innate capacity to manage the psychological burden caused by mental stress and trauma.

Historically, foreign assistance programs that focus on mental health and

emotional well-being have received much less attention than those that focus on meeting physical needs. According to the World Health Organization, countries spend on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health. Also, international development assistance for mental health has never exceeded 1% of all health-related development assistance. Nearly one billion people globally have a mental health disorder and those with severe disorders tend to die 10-20 years earlier than the average life expectancy.

Trauma healing through art

by Katherine Smith, Border/Migration & Communications Coordinator, West Coast MCC

Thousands of asylum seekers have spent months to years living in uncertainty in northern Mexico as they wait to enter the United States to formally begin the asylum process. The Biden administration continues to use COVID-19 as a pretext to prevent

While reasons for leaving one's country vary, many migrants experience stressful and traumatic events. To alleviate the stressors on mobile populations, West Coast MCC has worked alongside the binational migrant arts ministry Artisans Beyond Borders as they offer hope and healing through providing traditional embroidery material to individuals who continue to wait to enter the U.S.

With a "make one, teach one" model, participants themselves are coordinators and teachers. The program offers accompaniment, purpose and hope through the rhythmic act of embroidering manta cloths. As founder Valarie James explains, trauma informed arts therapy presents "the opportunity to directly help these vulnerable families using the healing power of creativity to restore grace and agency through the work of the hands, solidarity among the artisans, and respect for cultural and familial arts across borders."



Finished Manta cloths from Mexico, hand-washed and dried on the line by Tucson's all-volunteer Friends of Artisans Beyond Borders. (Artisans Beyond Borders photo/Valarie Lee James)

asylum seekers from entering the country, in violation of U.S. commitments to international treaties.

A resident of a rehabilitation center run by MCC partner KOSHISH National Mental Health Self Help Organization in Lalitpur, Nepal, participates in art therapy, learning traditional beading techniques. (MCC photo/Luke Jantzi)

Healing and rebuilding in Nigeria

In working toward sustainable peace in Nigeria, Mennonite Central Committee supports partners as they respond to various types of trauma caused by poverty, marginalization, grief, the disruption of social networks and other factors.

Trauma informed models such as Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) aim to increase resilience and re-integration in communities affected by violence by equipping participants with peacebuilding and alternatives-to-violence response skills.

Many years of localized conflicts and violence, mass atrocity crimes, civil war and lethal responses to peaceful protests have caused post-traumatic stress disorder in individuals and planted seeds of generational trauma. These seeds of trauma, when untreated and unaddressed, lead to cycles of reprisal, animosity, bias, unforgiveness and re-traumatization.

Indispensably, the causes and triggers of trauma must also be addressed, including poor governance, corruption,

poverty and unemployment, ethno-religious and other forms of conflict, weak judicial and security structures and media apathy.

Currently in Nigeria, more than two million people are internally displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency and more than 10 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. As in the United States, some attitudes and cultural understandings portray mental health as a stigma, which can impede individuals from seeking help and stymie calls for more government funding.

Effective psychosocial support programs respond to disrupted social networks and communal structures, provide specialized mental health interventions and treat mental health disorders with effective, contextualized and accessible screening, diagnosis and treatment. Without such programs, largescale, unresolved trauma in communities has a significant detrimental impact on attempts at conflict reduction, resolution and peace.

Recommendations

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programing as part of a holistic peacebuilding strategy enhances stability and security in conflict-affected communities. Currently, MHPSS programs are spread out through various foreign assistance accounts in the U.S. federal budget. The lack of a designated account adversely affects relief, development and peacebuilding efforts.

Congress should create a dedicated foreign assistance account for MHPSS programs by passing the Mental Health in International Development Settings (MINDS) Act (H.R. 3988 and S. 2105). If passed, the MINDS Act would create a new "Title III" account in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs budget

Rebuilding lives in eastern DR Congo

Recent factors causing stress and trauma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo include escalating violence, an economic downturn, food insecurity, a volcanic eruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, more than one million Congolese refugees are hosted in neighboring countries. More than 5 million people are internally displaced inside DR Congo especially in the Kasai, Tanganyika, Ituri and Kivu regions. Mennonite communities are among the worst affected.

MCC partner Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (which birthed the HROC model) provides psychosocial support and food assistance to survivors of violence in the city of Beni. Paluku Tsongo, a resident of Beni, says, "the teachings of HROC helped me to know how to understand and live in the community. Especially, it provided my family and I with the ability to understand and overcome emotions. The different wars and massacres have affected us a lot. We continue to relive the traumatic elements that took place. We recommend HROC to multiply the trainings on trauma healing because the healing is not yet complete and many other people in the community also need it. Also, because trauma lives with us in our homes and in our communities."

Abdullahi Isa of the Kadunu community presents during a session on active listening circles at the advanced training on psychosocial support in Mangu in Nigeria. (Emergency Preparedness and Response Team photo/Simon Afala)



for MHPSS programing administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. State Department.

Furthermore, U.S. foreign assistance for MHPSS programs should be increased, particularly funding directed to local projects for capacity building, resilience and community trust-building. And, U.S. funded MHPSS programing must be context-sensitive, proactive, and flexible, incorporating local knowledge about cultural and traditional sources of resilience.

To prevent mental and psychological breakdown in traumatized communities, funding mechanisms must also incorporate memorialization projects which show respect, honor and remembrance for victims, thereby supporting recovery from grief and pain and breaking the cycle of violence. ✨

Worship resources

Scripture readings

Isaiah 61:1-4
2 Corinthians 1:3-7
Matthew 4:23-25

Songs

VT #217 Hark! the glad sound!
VT #613 God, be with us
VT #644 Healer of our every ill

Opening prayer

(VT #862)

You who open doors and dismantle
barriers,
open our hearts to praise you,
that we might live the full truth of who
we are,
that we might live as neighbors and
friends, no longer strangers and
enemies;
open our hearts to the transforming
power of your love,
that we might forgive and reconcile,
making peace and learning war no
more,
that we might be your people, one body
in one Spirit, to tell your grace to all
the world.
We pray in the name of the One who
walked among us as brother and
friend. Amen.

Psalm reading

(based on Psalm 46; refrain Psalm
23:6a)

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble. Therefore
we will not fear, though the earth
should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart
of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with
its tumult.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life.*

There is a river whose streams make
glad the city of God, the holy
habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall
not be moved; God will help it when
the morning dawns.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life.*

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God
of Jacob is our refuge.

He makes wars cease to the end of the
earth; he breaks the bow, and
shatters the spear;

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am
exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life.*

Closing prayer

(adapted from VT #978)

Hear our prayer, O God of healing and
hope,

We pray for greater understanding,
compassion, strength, endurance.

Make your presence known even when
fears threaten, when anxieties ove
whelm, when thoughts fragment and
accuse, and the burden seems too
heavy to carry one more step.

Almighty and merciful God, grant one
more moment, one more breath, one
more foot in front of the other.

Bring healing, Restore peace. Raise up
hope.

Sending song

VT #827 Move in our midst

IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

Senator _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3121
senate.gov

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 224-3121
house.gov

President Joe Biden
The White House
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
whitehouse.gov/contact

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All biblical quotes are from the New
Revised Standard Version, unless other-
wise noted.

Facts about psychosocial support

MCC photo/Garry Mayhew



**More than
1 in 5 people**
living in settings affected by conflict
**have a mental health
condition**

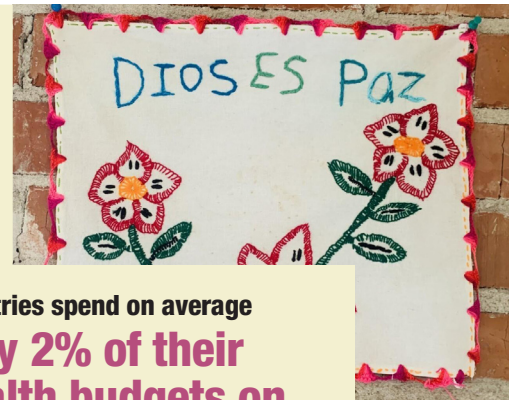


Globally, there is less than
**1 mental health
professional for
every 10,000 people**

Suicide claims the lives of close to
**800,000 people
every year**
or 1 person every 40 seconds



Loreto Schools photo/Herbert Onwa

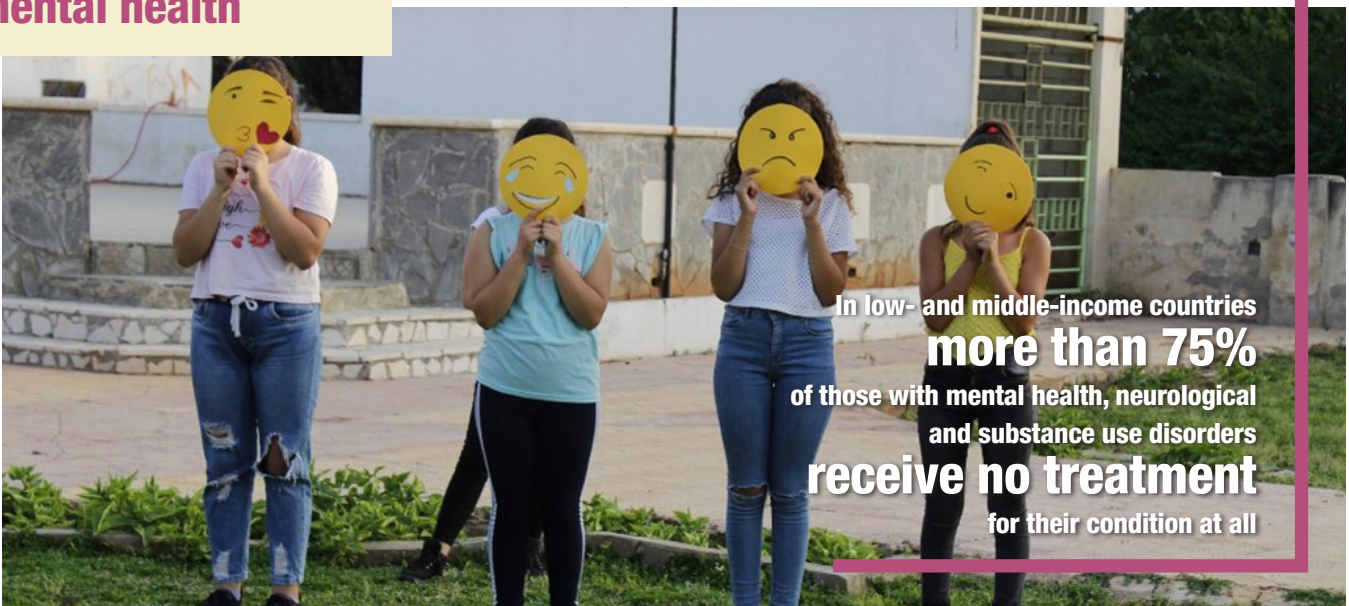


MCC photo/Katherine Smith

Countries spend on average
**only 2% of their
health budgets on
mental health**

**Every \$1 spent on treatment
for common mental health disorders brings
a return of \$4
in improved health and productivity**

Photo courtesy of Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches



In low- and middle-income countries
more than 75%
of those with mental health, neurological
and substance use disorders
receive no treatment
for their condition at all

POLICY PRINCIPLES

U.S. policies on psychosocial support should...

1 Establish a designated account.

Currently, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programs are spread out through various foreign assistance accounts in the U.S. federal budget. The lack of a designated account adversely affects relief, development and peacebuilding efforts. **Congress should create a dedicated “Title III” foreign assistance account for MHPSS programs in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs budget, administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. State Department.**

2 Increase foreign assistance.

U.S. foreign assistance for MHPSS should be increased, particularly funding directed to local projects for capacity building, resilience and community trust-building. **Every dollar spent on treatment for common mental health disorders returns four dollars in improved health and productivity.** International development assistance for mental health has never exceeded 1% of all health-related development assistance.

3 Adapt to local contexts.

U.S.-funded MHPSS programing must be context-sensitive, proactive and flexible, incorporating local knowledge about cultural and traditional sources of resilience. Programs should build the infrastructure for specialized mental health services, community-based resiliency, sustainability and local ownership while strengthening accompaniment and mutual learning in partnership with local organizations.

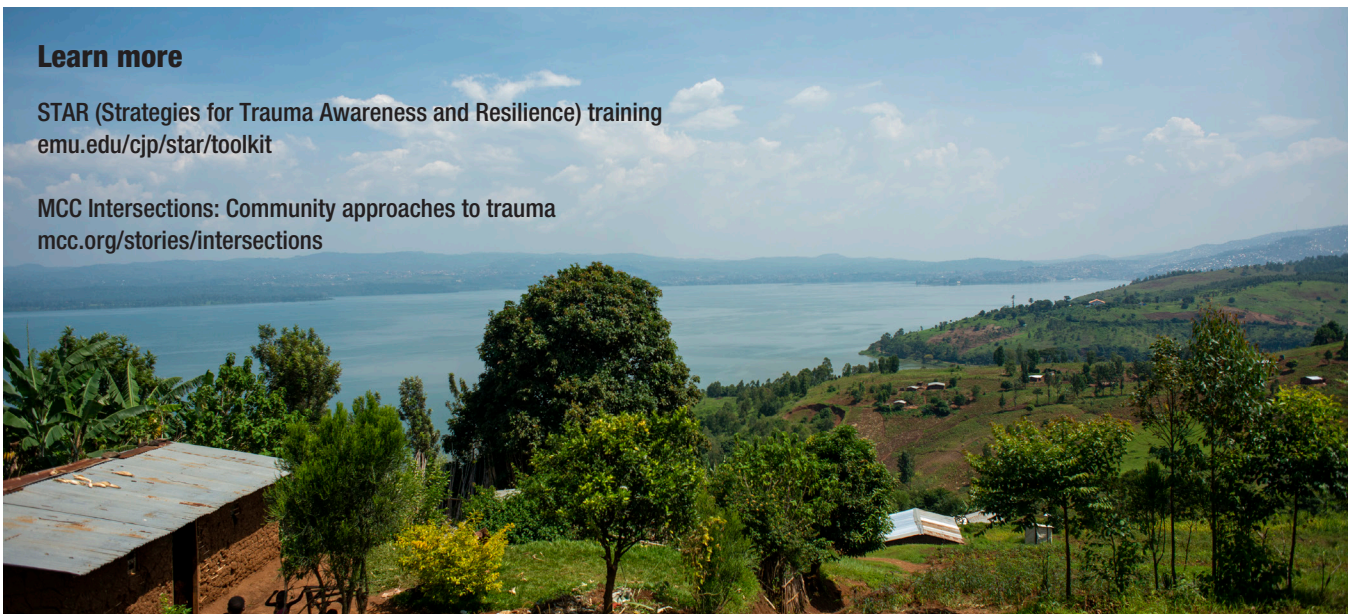
4 Support memorialization projects.

To prevent mental and psychological breakdown in traumatized communities, funding mechanisms must also **incorporate memorialization projects which show respect, honor and remembrance for victims,** supporting recovery from grief and pain and breaking the cycle of violence.

Learn more

STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience) training
emu.edu/cjp/star/toolkit

MCC Intersections: Community approaches to trauma
mcc.org/stories/intersections



MCC photo/Matthew Lester