

CONNECTIONS

The CCVT bi-monthly newsletter

March-April 2015



“Volunteers are the heart of the Centre”

Thank you for making our City a better place!



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CCVT NEWS AND UPDATES

News from CCVT

Farewell to Thilaga

Volunteer of the Month

Interpretation Tips for Volunteers

Seema Das to carry the Pan Am/ Parapan
Am torch

Reflection on the Trauma and Mental
Health Workshop

Wrap-up: Recent Events

Upcoming Events

Befriender's Cafe

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

Looking Forward

Editorial Committee

Aisling O'Doherty

Aylin Manduric

Taylor Davis

Mbalu Lumor

CCVT Mandate

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT gives hope after horror.

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News from CCVT



The CCVT Connections Newsletter, which is published bi-monthly, is intended to inform and engage the Center's volunteers in important events, news, and meetings, and in doing so, to acknowledge the vital role they play in fulfilling the CCVT's mandate.

According to Volunteer Canada, there are over 13 million volunteers making a difference across the country. The week of April 12-18 was National Volunteer Week. This is a time to recognize, celebrate and thank volunteers for their energy and dedication on a daily basis. It is a time to show that your work matters, that it is not only appreciated but also valued. For over 35 years CCVT has continued to rely on volunteers who are the heart of the agency. CCVT is pleased to thank all volunteers for their dedication, hard work and commitment to empowering clients and to CCVT's mission!

In particular, I would like to thank Ellen Kert (volunteer) for her creativity and commitment in teaching the Citizenship Classes. The class continues to be high in demand, with over 25 students attending regularly. The feedback from students has been positive and the success rate of students passing their test has been great. So thank you very much Ellen!

The past months have continued to be a great learning experience. Thank you to everyone who participated in the focus group discussions and those who continue to give feedback on a regular basis. Your feedback is greatly appreciated. In the next few weeks, I will be following up with you to update your volunteer files and to tap into some hidden talents/skills on how you can best support clients and make your volunteer experience more rewarding.

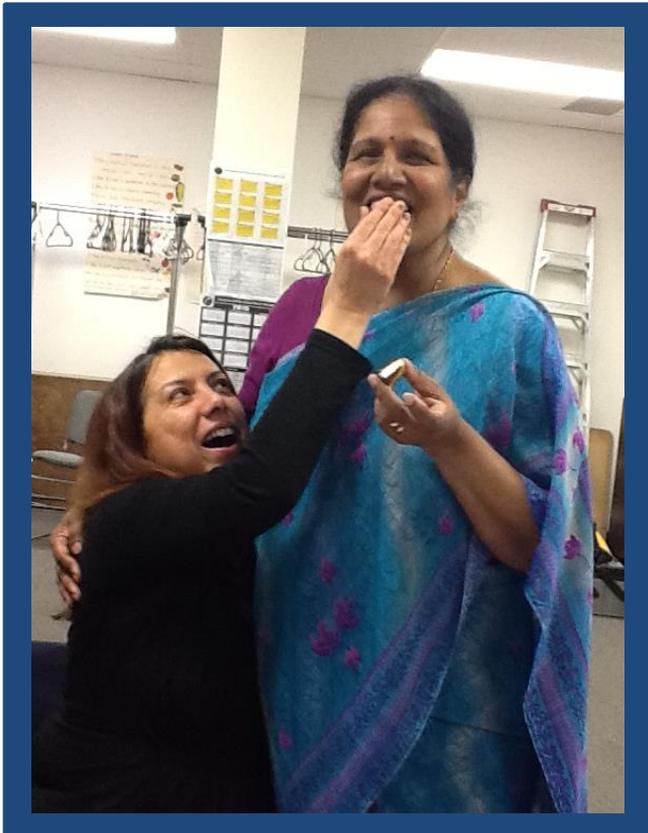
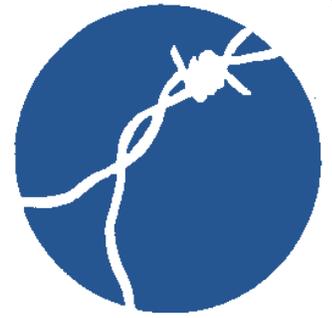
The next months will be busy with upcoming events such as World Refugee Day, June 26, International Day in support of victims of torture and CCVT Annual picnic. I would like to invite and hope to meet all of you at the events. You will find additional information inside this issue.

Furthermore, your ongoing support and prompt response in taking volunteer tasks have been amazing. Let's keep up the great work!

Warm Regards,

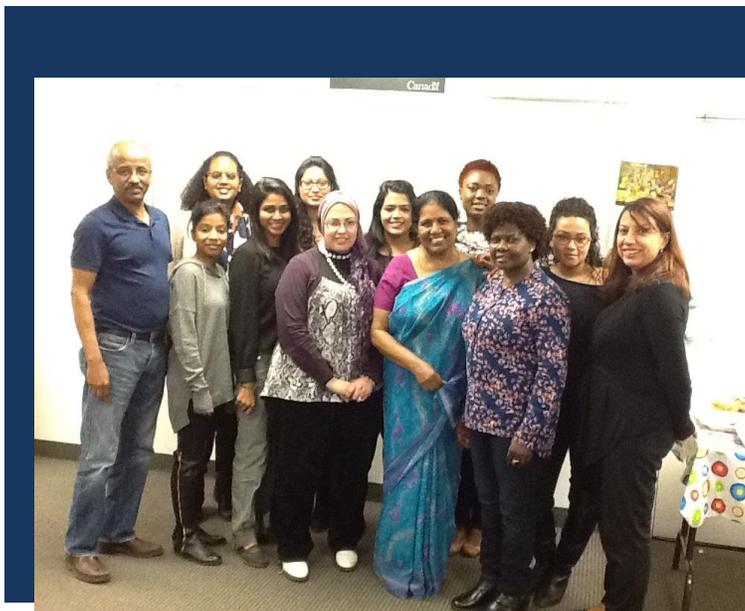
Mbalu Lumor, Manager, Community Engagement

Farewell to Thilaga Jeganathan



After 21 years of valuable service, the CCVT is wishing Thilaga Jeganathan a happy retirement. A long-time staff member and friend of the CCVT. Thilaga has been an outstanding role model and leader for her students.

It is with heavy hearts that we bid farewell to Thilaga, whose positive contributions have been so valuable to the Centre. Thank you Thilaga, and on behalf of the CCVT, have a happy and relaxing retirement!



“Thilaga, CCVT is going to miss you dearly. Your commitment to the agency, your generosity to fellow colleagues and your love for the clients will never be forgotten. We wish you health, happiness and much Deserved rest!”

We are proud to share with all of you a touching farewell letter written by Thilaga for her friends and colleagues at the CCVT:

To All My Wonderful Colleagues,

As many of you know, I'm retiring from my second home- CCVT by the end of today. I'd like to take this time to thank each and every one of you for helping to create such a satisfying and pleasant work environment over the last 21 years. As happy as I am to be moving on to the next chapter of my life, I can't help but be a little sad that I won't be seeing all of you on such a regular basis. I've enjoyed (almost) every moment here, from the funny and interesting conversations in between the working hours to boost our energy levels and to relieve the stress levels, to the regular staff parties and events.

But, beyond this, most of all I'll miss working with such an efficient and competent team of individuals. I'm so proud of what we've accomplished over the years especially to establish our Scarborough Branch, and I truly appreciate the support and guidance that was always available to me.

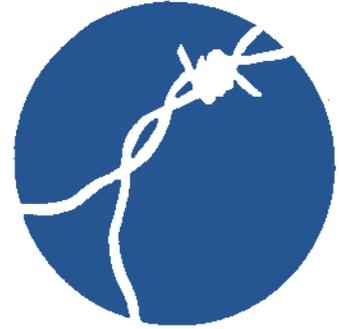
I want to express my sincere gratitude for the support you've offered me over the years. We have shared a wonderful work relationship as well as friendship. All of your support has made working here an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Also, thank you for the wonderful retirement party. I really appreciated all of the kind words and well wishes which I'll cherish forever. As I look forward to a new life after my retirement, I will certainly miss the enjoyable time I have spent working with you.

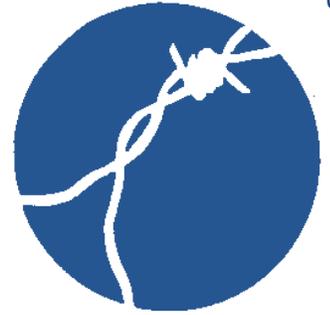
My special thanks to my great Bosses for all what you did to me, to the very Supportive Board of Directors and my sweet little team of Scarborough Branch.

I would really appreciate if Mulugeta could extend my gratitude to the Board of Directors.

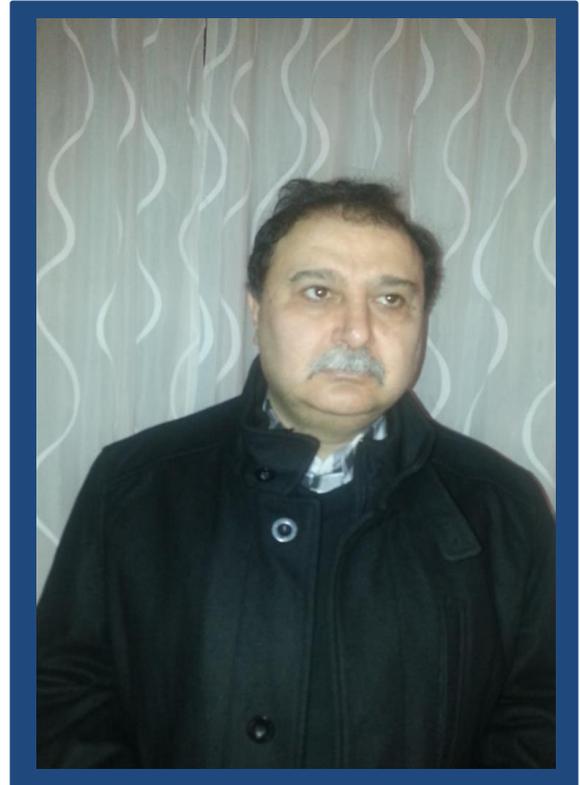
With all my love and Best Wishes,
Thilaga



Staff Volunteer Nominations: Mohammad Sabih



Mohammad is one of CCVT's most dedicated volunteer interpreters. Having worked with the CCVT since July of 2013, he is an accredited translator who has made an immense contribution to the center over the past two years. It is thanks to people like Mohammad that CCVT is able to connect clients to a vast array of services across the greater Toronto area. Thank you Mohammad, on behalf of CCVT!



"I did about more than 80 assignments for CCVT. I am still hopefully going to do more."

- Mohammad Sabih

"Mohammed has been an invaluable asset to CCVT, as he has provided countless interpretation/translation services for highly vulnerable clients. He regularly goes above and beyond his duties, to ensure that CCVT clients have their interpretation needs met at counselling appointments, medical appointments, social service appointments, etc. He has also helped escort vulnerable clients to appointments. Furthermore, he has assisted me in translating mental health psycho-educational documents into Arabic, which I now use with Arabic speaking clients, who cannot read in English. This means that more clients have access to mental health related information, regardless of their language skills. He is always professional, friendly, and shows responsibility and conscientiousness when providing assistance to clients at CCVT."

- Sidonia Couto, CCVT Mental Health Counselor



Staff Volunteer Nominations continued.....

CCVT would like to recognize the hard work of Alaa Al Fahmy, a befriender and Arabic interpreter.



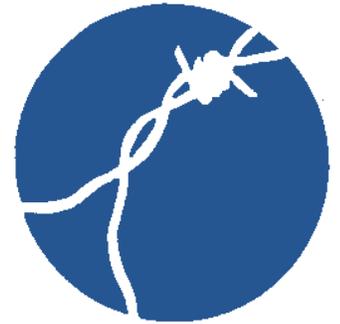
“Alaa has helped this client in the ongoing healing process by being there for her at all times on the phone or in person.”

-Mildred Fidele, CCVT Trauma Counselor

“She has been an incredible support to our client and really advocates for her. I think that much of this client's current coping is due directly to Alaa's support.”

-Dr. Debra Stein, CCVT Psychiatrist

Volunteer Contribution: Interpretation Tips for Volunteers



Hello to my fellow CCVT Volunteers!

My name is Zeynep Kardesseven and I have been a Turkish language interpreter with CCVT for about a year now. I've been asked to share my personal experience with interpreting and to give some advice on what to do, as well as certain situations to avoid.

I'd be lying if I said interpreting does not drain you emotionally. I remember my very first interpreting session I was left in tears while listening to the story of the client. I had to quickly turn my head so that neither the client nor the counsellor would see me cry.



To listen to stories of such heartache and torture undoubtedly can affect any individual, and for me personally, it was a lot to handle for my very first time of interpreting. Naturally in emotional situations like that our basic instinct is to try to comfort that client. It's almost human nature to comfort any individual we might see in distress in a frail attempt to help them feel better. However, it is not our responsibility as interpreters to do so.

To tell a client "it's okay" does nothing for that client, because unfortunately it's not going to be okay, at least not for a long while. This is what was told to me by several members of the CCVT staff and I've remembered it ever since. It took me awhile to accept the fact that my sole purpose when I'm sitting in that room with the client and the counsellor is to just reiterate whatever the client is saying, nothing more.

As expected in stressful emotional situations, tensions arise and it becomes difficult to not become overwhelmed with anger, sadness and frustration but it's always important to remember our sole purpose for being in that room and that is to give the client a voice. We may not always understand or agree with what they're saying but your language abilities are giving that individual an opportunity to express what they might have been suppressing for years. It took me awhile to be able to let go of my personal emotions while interpreting and focus on the task at hand but it is what is required of us and what will result in the best outcome for all parties involved.

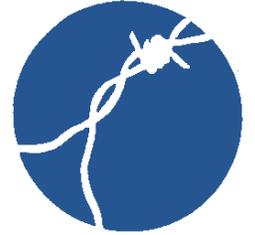
Always remember, there are also resources for you as volunteers to utilize within CCVT in order to ensure that your overall health comes first. When interpreting was starting to feel very overwhelming for me, I spoke to several counsellors as well as Mbalu Lumor, our community engagement manager, and expressed what I was feeling. At the time I felt very embarrassed and ashamed for becoming so personally affected by these interpreting sessions.

“To tell a client ‘it’s okay’ does nothing for that client, because unfortunately it’s not going to be okay, at least not for a long while.”

It took some counselling in order for me to realize that these are all completely normal emotions and it was nothing to be ashamed of. Without discussing these feelings with a trusted individual in the office, you’re only harming yourself. If you’re feeling stressed as an interpreter, talk to someone about it; your health always comes first. It took me awhile to accept the fact that I need to talk to someone about the strains that interpreting can have on a volunteer, but doing so ensured my continued work with CCVT as a happy and enthusiastic volunteer.

Without volunteers like you CCVT would not be able to help as many clients in so many different aspects of their lives. Always remember that when it feels like things might be getting a little too overwhelming. Interpreting is undeniably a very difficult task, but also a very humbling and rewarding one once you see the gradual change in the client’s overall experience with coming to CCVT.

Contributed by: Zeynep Kardesseven, CCVT Volunteer Interpreter



Seema Das on Bearing the Pan Am/ Parapan Am Torch

CCVT Volunteer Seema Das reflects on being selected to be a torchbearer for the 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games

I think most of you know about the Pan Am & Pan American Games. They are the third largest international multi-sport Games in the world. They are held every four years held for the athletes of the 41 PASO (the Pan American Sports Organization) member nations. In 1951, the first Pan American Games were held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in 1999, the inaugural Parapan American Games were held in Mexico City.

In 1967, and in 1999, Canada had honored to host the Games twice in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This year, Toronto will be the proud host city of the Pan Am & Parapan Am Games from July 10 to 26 and from August 7 to 15. 16,08 athletes from 28 countries will compete in 15 sports to qualify for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.

The Pan Am Games begin with a Torch Relay deeply rooted in history and tradition. The Toronto Torch Relay will be the largest yet, sharing the spirit of this tradition with everyone watching the games.



I have always loved nature, sports and games. In my life as an immigrant here in Canada, as a registered Social Worker, and Assaulted Women's & Children's Counsellors/Advocate, I silently remember my friends Ivy, Deepa, and Tanusree, who attempted multiple sports events for the Schools and University Championships. However, it is not easy for a woman today to find time for sports and it is still difficult to practice sports in our patriarchal and often stereotyped society. However, sports are a good source of entertainment and an enjoyable way to do exercise which is the most important way to take care of oneself. Sports are a form of education that can be passed from generation to generation. I feel proud to be a Torch Bearer for the 2015 Pan Am Games, because it gives me a chance to enjoy this once in a lifetime opportunity and show my support for immigrant women and young children who wish to play sports in Canada.

Looking Back: Trauma and Mental Health Workshop



CCVT volunteer Ruth Elufa reflects on the Trauma and Mental Health Training Workshop led by Dr. Clair Pain on February 25.

During introductions, we were asked to give our reasons for taking the training. Amongst our many reasons, several stood out as being shared by most of the participants: some of us had undergone traumatic situations, while others had close relatives who have experienced the same. We were eager to learn from the various perspectives each participant brought with them, and discovered that some participants were influenced by tragic incidents in their home countries to study mental health and trauma. The common point of interest is that all the participants were eager to work with people who have experienced trauma and mental health in their lives.

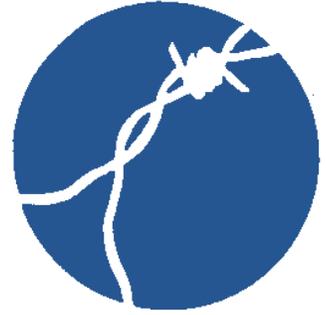
During the session, we learnt that only about 5%-8% of people who have suffered from trauma will be diagnosed with PTSD or another mental health problem. We were taught about the resilience of these people who have gone through trauma, and the importance of taking care of our own mental health as we help those who need it. Different challenges facing those who help people with mental illness were addressed, such as that of being sympathetic instead of empathetic, the fear of being mistaken for an enemy, and personal health situations that could change and affect the process. Strengths were discussed as well. Among those strengths discussed were being non-judgemental, being a good listener, and showing commitment to understanding the position of the other person. An important point of note was also the universality of trauma, mental illness, and PTSD, which can affect anyone regardless of race or status.

We saw pictures and videos of people who were suffering from trauma. Some suffered bereavement, loss of property, or homelessness, trekking with or without their belongings, carrying heavy loads bare footed. They were probably searching for a safe place. It was made clear that people suffer from trauma whenever they have not been able to grieve about their situations.

We also watched a very fascinating video about a refugee who lost his house and all his relatives to arson by the government of his country. In recounting his story, the tone and pacing of his voice and speech respectively depict the pain and sufferings he had gone through. He recounted how he trekked for miles to the border of another country where he was sent to a refugee camp. In the camp, he found friendship while playing football, and found a new home when his new friend took him to his mother, who accepted him as her son.

This video showed that refugees themselves play the greatest part in their own healing processes. The refugee in the video was a very resilient character. The woman who took him into her house and treated him well is a good example to those of us volunteering with these people. Our interaction with these friends can create a positive impact that will enhance continuity and progress or a negative impact that could lead to withdrawal.

Wrap Up: Recent Events



International Women's Day

On March 8, 2015, CCVT celebrated Women's Day with a gathering and presentation on powerful women through history. Men and women came together for the celebrations over Ethiopian coffee, food, and music to stand in solidarity with women who struggled to defend the rights to their bodies, territories, and communities. The festivities were accompanied by group discussion on key women's rights issues, and served as an engaging and thoughtful educational event. Thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate Women's Day with CCVT!



Youth Roundtable Discussion

A second Roundtable Discussion for Newcomer Youth was held during March break, as a follow up to the Anti-Bullying event which ran in December. This jam-packed day involved over thirty youth survivors from all over the world, and encouraged community-building, creative self-expression, and collective goal setting. Guest facilitators included representatives from Children's Peace Theatre and the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University. To cap off the day, we walked to a nearby movie theatre and watched *The Hobbit* as a group!



Wrap Up: Recent Events



Refugee Rights Day

April 4th is the anniversary of the Supreme Court's 1985 Singh decision. On this day, Canada and the global community celebrated the universal rights of refugees around the world. In this decision the Supreme Court found that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the fundamental rights of refugees. The Court decided that 'everyone' includes refugee claimants in the sentence: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice".

Ezat Mossallanejad our Senior Policy Analyst/Researcher spoke to the crowd about the rights of refugees to seek asylum anywhere in the world including Canada. Further more, he defined Refugees Rights day not only for the recognized and registered refugees but also the refugee claimants. These refugee claimants in Canada have the rights to an oral hearing in accordance with the principle of fundamental international law. His inspiring speech encouraged the clients to integrate into the Canadian society by becoming active members in the community around them and where they live.

Refugee's Rights Day was a fun day for CCVT clients. It was cultural day for everyone with music from different countries, in various languages such as Amharic, Arabic, and Farsi. It also included different kinds of delicious foods, beverages and a special Ethiopian coffee ceremony

*Contributed by Khaled Nour,
CCVT Volunteer*

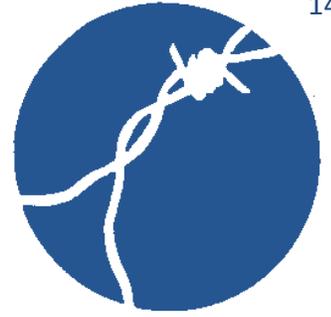


Staff Training: Anti Human Trafficking

On April 17 2015, CCVT staff came together for a training session on human trafficking. Many people in vulnerable regions of the world are at high risk of falling victim to this too-common violation. Learning to address the problem and help people move past it is an important part of the CCVT's toolkit for helping clients.



CCVT Panel: Human Rights and Current Crises



On April 10, 2015, CCVT had the pleasure to receive a unique and powerful combination of guest speakers: Paulina Wyrzykowski, Samira Kanji, Gloria Nafsiger and Ron Poulton who provided us with an insight into the topic of “Human Rights and current event crises.” Wyrzykowski introduced us into the discussion with an appealing reflection: “Many questions cannot be answered,” she said, “but these should not be forgotten.” The international community’s quest for the guarantee of human rights across borders though “rosy-pink” in the NGO world as Paulina suggested was the case in the ICC, Human rights discourse is a lot more dynamic in practice. Since the creation of the Universal Declaration in 1948 it has become evident that human rights without the proper assessment of local historical, political and social contexts is an idea dangerously open to manipulation in our contemporary world.

In 1998, the International Criminal Court was established in an attempt to create an entity that could enforce international law. Since its origin there have been nine investigations, of which all are in Africa. Paulina Wyrzykowski’s incredible experience with the Ugandan peace accords after two decades of civil war with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has allowed her to realize how government’s political agendas affects what she refers to as the *prioritization of human rights*, the idea that we attribute certain values to selective aspects of the discourse to fit our personal needs. Therefore Paulina asks the crucial question we all wonder: “Are international laws even universal?” The answer unfortunately is not for now, but she advocates for the proper understanding of the context of a conflict before any form of help can be provided. An example of this is the local reaction of Ugandans on the ICC’s intervention, denoting them at times as arrogant and westernized. This makes the audience further explore the idea of whether human rights as of now is a tool of imperialism.

Our second speaker Samira Kanji continued the theme of right’s prioritization with her interest in the use of freedom of speech and political humor in the context of the Charlie Hebdo incident this past January and the Muhammad cartoon controversy in Denmark in the year 2005. Kanji’s clever presentation begins with two options to explain the causes of these tragic incidents and their consequences for Muslims around world. Choice A. is, are Muslims humorless? Or options B. are they victims to particular discrimination under the facade of *freedom of speech*? By presenting the audience with a series of articles written both for and against the dilemma of freedom of expression Samira makes two crucial arguments. The first one is the distinction between satire and sadistic humor, the use of satire is the voice of the oppressed, the weak in an attempt to target those in the power position. The use of sadistic humor, what she says is seen in these cartoons is the abuse of the weaker party by the dominant one which further undermines these groups’ identities. Secondly and probably the most interesting twist to her presentation is the acknowledgement that total freedom of speech is simply impossible. Let’s talk about double standards...the countries that advocate the most for such freedom are also the ones who have close control over what information and ideas are shared in their public media. Like Samira said, “no western cartoonist would sign an anti-Semitic piece, it would ruin their careers.”

Gloria Nafsiger provided a presentation on one of Amnesty International's campaigns: Stop Torture. In the last five years torture has taken place in 141 countries, such statistics and others presented by Gloria reflect a dangerous reality where there is a tacit acceptance of torture both by governments who seek valuable political information and civilians' beliefs on whether they could suffer torture if taken into custody by their own government. To put things into perspective 33% of Canadians said torture would be acceptable under certain conditions. By showing this reality, the campaign intends to create awareness on the issue and provide information on people's rights against torture. Nevertheless, Gloria ended her presentation with an initiative, The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, to strengthen national measurements through regular visits to places of detention to evaluate the possibility of any cruel condition. Interestingly enough, Canada has not signed the protocol, which is a shame as Gloria explains because Canada's example could lead many other countries to join the cause.

Finally, Ron Poulton's experience working in United Nation Peacekeeping missions has made him question Canada's responsibility and global leadership. Consistent with Wyrzykowski, Ron has come to realize the negative effects of Western measurements imposed in external crises that face completely different contexts. His experience in Cambodia made him realized this. United Nations interventions help in the reconstruction and security of areas in conflict; however, these interventions are not sustainable once the UN leaves. Subsequently, once the United Nations is gone, the public is left in charge with the continuity of security. These will face a greater cultural challenge that most likely will not require western mechanisms. Following this idea, Poulton believes the best thing the international community can do is not to impose what they believe is right, but leave the state in conflict alone to face the challenges within their context and support them externally.

Violations against human rights happen every second. States have the obligation to guarantee their civilians' human rights. Sadly, the international community faces a greater challenge, as there are no international mechanisms that serve to the variety of conflict. Diversity calls for a greater understanding on the issue, which is a very difficult task. Nevertheless, we cannot let these issues be forgotten. We need to keep challenging ourselves to find the best possible solutions, which is only possible by looking back and learning from past experiences, and trying not to commit the same mistakes.

Contributor: Alessia D. Rodriguez





Befriending Café

Prendre une tasse de café avec mon amie...

In June, CCVT will be hosting an event to bring together volunteers and clients in the befriending program! Chas Lawther a long time CCVT befriender will be leading the day with music and entertainment!

DATE: June 13, 2015

TIME: 11:00-1:00

LOCATION: CCVT Downtown – 194 Jarvis Street



A CUP OF
COFFEE
SHARED WITH
A FRIEND IS
HAPPINESS
TASTED AND
TIME WELL
SPENT.



Volunteer Orientation Session

Join us at the end of May for the next CCVT volunteer orientation session! Volunteers are needed to do a presentation for the new volunteers.

DATE: May 30, 2015

TIME: 10:00AM – 1:00PM

LOCATION: CCVT Downtown – 194 Jarvis street

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Editorial Committee

Do you like what you see in the CCVT Connections Newsletter? Do you want to change it? The CCVT Editorial Committee is looking for 2 new volunteers to edit, format, and write for the newsletter! To get involved, send an email to mlumor@ccvt.org

Event Planning Subcommittee

Do you enjoy CCVT events? Would you like to help plan our next panel or put together next year's gala? The event planning subcommittee of the Fundraising Committee is looking for 3 new members! To get involved, send an email to mlumor@ccvt.org

Auction Items Subcommittee

The Fundraising Committee is looking for 3 new volunteers for our Auction Items Subcommittee! If you are interested in fundraising, and want to get involved, please send an email to mlumor@ccvt.org

CCVTBlogs Project Pilot Launch

In May, a new project designed to offer clients a way to connect with the community, practice English, and share stories and advice on their experience of coming to a new country will begin in the morning computer classes. The CCVT Blogs project will help clients in the computer classes learn about blogging, and help build a stronger community around CCVT. For more information on the project, contact Mbalu Lumor, and look out for more updates!

Upcoming Events

World Refugee Day

June 20, 2015 is United Nations World Refugee Day, a day to honour the resilience and courage of people who were forced to leave their home countries because of violence, persecution, and conflict. It is estimated that there are 16.7 million refugees around the world today, many of whom must struggle to access essential services or find a safe place to live.

The CCVT encourages everyone to take some time on June 20 to acknowledge the struggles of refugees around the world, and to appreciate the contributions of refugees within their own communities.

United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

On June 26, 1987, the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment came into force, adding weight to a long-standing international norm against torture.

In 1997, the United Nations General Assembly marked June 26 the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, a day to celebrate the inherent dignity of every person and acknowledge the still-present need to take action against torture and human rights violations around the world.

This year, **Rehabilitation** of survivors is the theme for the 26 June campaign. Rehabilitation empowers torture victims to resume as full a life as possible. However, rebuilding the life of someone whose dignity has been destroyed takes time and is the result of long-term material, medical, psychological and social support. The CCVT looks to stand in support for those who have suffered on June 26 and every day of the year.

Please join us for a panel discussion, Photo exhibition, client performances and refreshments.

Location: University Of Toronto, Multifaith Centre, 569 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, ON M5S 2J7

Time: 12:00pm-4:00pm

CCVT Annual Picnic

ON SUNDAY, July 26, 2015

From 11:00AM — 4:00 PM

AT HIGH PARK PICNIC AREA 2 (see map) More details Coming soon!



