



CANADIAN CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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.

ADDRESSES:

Downtown office:

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Tel: 416-363-1066

Scarborough Office:

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Tel: 416-750-3045

The Hub @ Victoria Park & Eglinton:

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Tel: 647-847-2334. 647-847-2335

Mississauga office:

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Palace St. Office:

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Tel: 416-364-184

Disclaimer: The CCVT Connections, is fueled by the following goals: to engage volunteers in important events, news and meetings. In doing so, it acknowledges the vital role they play in fulfilling CCVT's mandate. It is published quarterly. The information provided in this publication is not controlled by the CCVT, and therefore, may not reflect the Centre's views, staff and team.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Huda Bukhari, Ismail Elnour, Ari Barbalat



We are still physically distanced but socially connected!

Message from the Community Engagement Program

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in profound and unprecedented ways. All of us are experiencing heightened anxiety about our health and safety and are coping with the negative emotional impacts of physical distancing. The consequences for CCVT's clients have been extreme: the death of a loved one, isolation with an abusive partner, and elevated risk of poverty and homelessness.

Our physical offices are closed to in-person services, but all our staff has been available online. CCVT's team has been connected with its clients virtually throughout. All of us are worried about the people we love, whether it is a relative, a friend or our community as a whole.

In the face of this ubiquitous pandemic, it is natural to feel powerless. Accordingly, we have reorganized and restructured to provide services to our clients, to take care of ourselves and to support those around us.

We have set up a GoFundMe Campaign for toys and food for children and youth and seniors. Please promote this campaign using your social media. Thank you!

http://fnd.us/81kAo3?ref=sh_09iEH6 (Groceries for Seniors)

http://fnd.us/31k8lf?ref=sh_09iEH6 (Toys for Kids)



NEW PROGRAM AT CCVT:



Mahnoush Kohpaei
Training Module Project Manager

NATIONAL TRAUMA INFORMED CARE PROJECT is an initiative led by a team at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture in collaboration with other national organizations. It is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. CCVT aims to develop a national tools and manuals curriculum in order to provide professional training for front-line settlement workers working with survivors of torture, genocide and other crimes against humanity.

This training project will assist to empower service users and service providers to work in tandem. This will remove barriers in understanding and make the settlement process more sensitive. It seeks to transform survivors from victims to active participants. Our approach brings together community engagement and community service.

INTRODUCING PROJECT STAFF:

Mahnoush Kohpaei has been in the leadership, learning and development, training and teaching environment for more than a decade with the strong belief in the power of positive thinking in the workplace. Colleagues describe her as a people-centred person who easily connects with strangers.

Her excellent presentation skills are based on teaching high school, and lecturing at the university level. She specializes in organizational behaviour and is an instructor of music. Mahnoush also has experience working with transgender and disabled youth and young adults.



*Merissa Gladys Peña, she/her
Needs Assessment Developer & Compiler*

"Hi! Kumusta! My name is **Merissa Gladys Peña**. I'm a graduate from the University of Toronto with a BSc in Psychology and French and I hold a diploma in Social Services from Seneca College. I'm passionate about making an impact in the lives of others whether it be making them laugh, creating art for a friend, or simply having a wholesome meal and chatting about what has been bringing us joy lately. At CCVT, I am a part of a team working on the National Trauma-Informed Care Project. The practice of Trauma-Informed Care and its principles is so important to me because it can be adapted to all people and all experiences - including our own. I hope you take a few minutes today to learn a little bit about what Trauma-Informed Care might mean to you and how you can practice it in your day-to-day life!"



*Madina Kane, she/her
Administrative and Outreach Assistant*

"Hello there, my name is **Madina Kane** and I am a recent graduate from York University, with a Bachelors of Arts in Global Health. I am working with CCVT as their Administrative and Outreach Worker supporting the development of the National Trauma-Informed Care Project.

I look forward to working with vulnerable populations, to creating systemic change and to promoting better world for people everywhere! Outside of work, I like to venture out and try new things, like teaching myself music production.

I believe that everyone has the right to be who they want, and do what they love. I hope my work can create that opportunity for others, especially newcomers to Canada. My hope will always be to inspire others and spark positivity in everything I do."

INTERVIEW: NADIA UMADAT: CCVT MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR, SCARBOROUGH

Q: How have you been managing yourself during this time and how have you been staying proactive?



A: I tried out a lot of new hobbies at the beginning of the quarantine. I have discovered walking and hiking to be really helpful for my mental health. It has given me a method to decompress, explore and stay active. I've been touring my community and discovering all the beautiful spaces in Scarborough that I have passed by for years, without a second thought. In the warmer weather, I made it a point to get outside everyday. I also tried out a few sports and I must say, I wasn't terrible at them! In the colder weather I have "binged" a lot of foreign content on Netflix; it has made me feel more connected with the outside world since it seems like travel is not in the cards for me this year.

Q: How are you attaining work-life balance and productivity as you work from home?

A: The virtual platform seems to make for a heavier workload; there are no other distractions and a lot more challenges. To cope, I have become really strict about my work-life balance, in a way that I never was when I was going into the office. I start and stop my working day exactly as scheduled and always take my lunch break. I try to get outside for a few minutes at lunch. It is really easy to start checking emails or updating files in the off hours and I am constantly reprimanding myself to maintain my own boundaries.

Q: How are you adjusting to this new normal?

A: In the new normal, some days are better than others. I am trying my best and I need to be gentle on myself when it's just not my day. There are lots of perks to working from home. I can attend meetings and training virtually. No more commuting or distractions. In the same vein, it's a very isolating experience. Sometimes you need to debrief with someone after a difficult client encounter and it is no longer as easy as knocking on your colleague's office door. I find myself missing the children and youth in my programs. Often, they would run into the office and give me a big hug. Or say something spontaneously hilarious. My days were hectic but so much fun and our current situation is still taking a lot of adjustment.

Q: How do you organize your day when working from home?

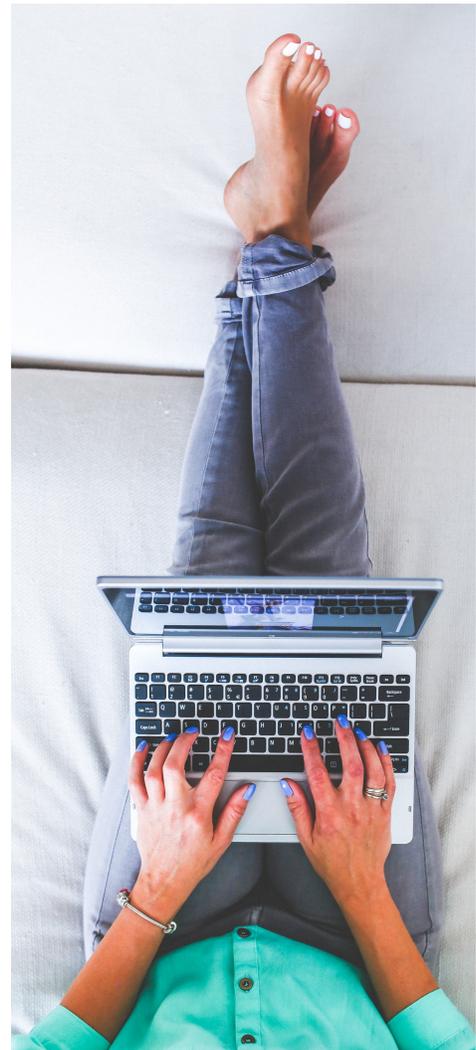
A: To be honest, this is still a work in progress. Currently, I start my work day with coffee and emails, both of which I love. I work from my bedroom as I need privacy for remote client meetings. I use my lunch hour to eat and then walk outside of a bit. The rest of the day depends on what I have scheduled, be it group programming, client work, meetings, committees, professional development etc. Everyday is different.

Q: How do you communicate with colleagues remotely?

A: Since we have been working remotely, our staff has held weekly debriefing sessions to discuss programs and issues. CCVT has staff at five locations and meeting virtually allows us to see more of each other. Presently, we feel like more of a cohesive unit rather than segregated branches. In addition, we do monthly individual meetings with our supervisors. I am in constant contact with our other Child and Youth Counsellor from the Jarvis office. We have used this remote period to do collaborations and projects which has been an awesome learning experience.

Q: How is CCVT supporting you during this time?

A: In addition to our debriefings and check-ins, CCVT continues to promote self-care. Before the debriefing sessions there is gentle yoga and meditation that is staff led. On Fridays we are encouraged not to meet with clients and to use the time to catch up on paperwork. Additionally, the first and last half an hour of each days are also used as preparation time and to collect our bearings. Over the summer, CCVT provided us with beautiful laptops. Throughout the pandemic we have been receiving a stipend to offset the cost of our cellular usage.



CLIENT SUPPORTS



Q: How do you keep in touch with your clients working virtually?

A: In the beginning, we kept in contact primarily via email and telephone. There were a lot of challenges with internet access and connectivity for everyone, myself included. I didn't want service users to feel pressured or embarrassed by requesting Zoom interactions. Now, it's more of a combination of the three, depending on the services user's preference.

Q: What issues are your clients facing?

A: At the beginning of the quarantine period, the challenges were immense. As I mentioned above, service users had issues with internet access and connectivity. Most did not have devices beyond their phones. The majority of clients are living in shelters or shared accommodations, with no privacy. People lost their jobs, immigration hearings were put on hold. Without childcare, parents could not take advantage of the pandemic positions that were being offered in the city. Families who had already experienced trauma were alone together in small spaces for prolonged periods with no other distractions. I had some very serious concerns regarding the caregiving capabilities of several of the families I was working with.

Mental health unwellness increased rapidly. In May, the world witnessed the brutal murder of Mr. George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests.

This added an additional layer of trauma and distress to the pandemic because most CCVT clients are from communities of colour. Things are settling down now, though I am worried with the upcoming holiday season and the spike in COVID-19 cases in Toronto.



Nadia Umadat,
CCVT Mental Health Counselor

Our cases at CCVT are very complex; during COVID-19 they have been even more so. Recently I assisted in a case that involved a young adult I have been working with for almost two years. She was growing increasingly frustrated at the long wait time for her asylum hearing and felt that COVID-19 had put a halt on her life. She was alone in Canada and recently ended a relationship and was feeling very isolated. We were meeting virtually once or twice a month to work through her feelings and adapt her coping skills for the new situation. Suddenly, she receives a virtual hearing date and the anxiety increased as she now has to make her final preparations amid global closures. We began conducting weekly virtual meetings as she required increased supports. I must concede it was difficult, as many programs and services I would have referred her to had not adapted to remote use. We got her an assessment with CCVT's youth psychiatrist and I was able to provide her with a detailed support letter, as I had been working with her for some time. I am happy to share that her case was accepted and she will be able to look forward to a brighter future in Canada.

*Thank
you!*

HAPPENINGS AT CCVT:

In providing these services, volunteers have been there to assist virtually in interpretation, translation, homework assistance, befriending, mentoring, assisting at our online workshops, support groups, social media access, and editing. As a team, volunteers have undertaken the following:

- Supported someone who has lost a loved one to COVID-19;
- Supported clients who are financially insecure through a partnership with the OCASI/WES Emergency Support Fund, where financial assistance was delivered to 24 families, and 8 individuals who were in a precarious financial situation;
- Supported clients with the purchase of computers or laptops to enable them to access virtual services;
- Supported clients who are experiencing domestic violence; and above all;
- Supported each other by meeting and mental health check-ins;
- Celebrated milestones together: the summer virtual picnic, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.
- In most of these services, volunteers have been there to assist virtually in interpretation, translation, homework assistance, befriending, mentoring, assisting at our online workshops, support groups, social media access, and editing.



Client in receipt of funds toward a computer

PRESENTATIONS/ WORKSHOPS - July - October 2020

During the months of July - October 2020, a series of Workshops and Presentations were held at the CCVT facilitated by CCVT staff and a session facilitated by two professors from Carleton University. Community members from Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and Australia attended. Thank you to those volunteers who also attended these sessions. **Please keep an eye out to upcoming sessions and register for them.**

The **CCVT Virtual Picnic** took place on July 14th, with over 60 clients and volunteers participating; Highlights included the following:

- A client presented a recipe cooked t her kitchen, a client presented a magic show and all enjoyed a meal together. CCVT staff shared their favourite recipes online and a game was held with a winner declaired.

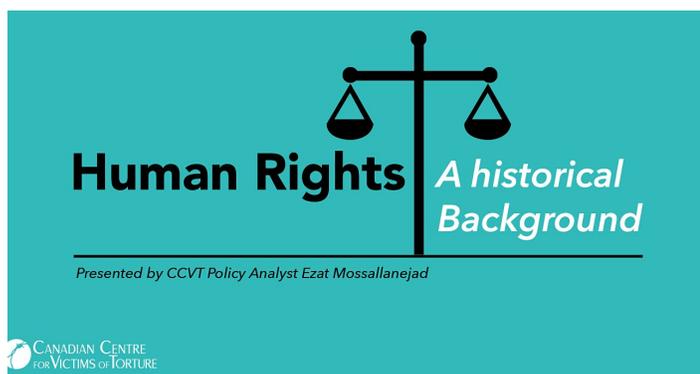
CCVT Staff Presented The Workshops: **COVID-19 and Parenting** on August 12, **Promising Practices on Self-Care** on August 19.

Carleton University Professors: Kimberly Matheson and Hymie Anisman presented on **Confronting Racism: From Vulnerability to Resilience** on August 27.



Interpreter Training: took place on October 6 and was facilitated by one of CCVT's network of physicians: Dr. Wendell Block.

Befriender Training: took place on October 17th and was a joint training sessions between the Community Engagement team and Chas Lawther, CCVT volunteer with a presentation of one of the CCVT's clients who is befriended by Chas.



Human Rights: A Historical Background: presented by CCVT's Policy Analyst Ezat Mossallanejad took place on November 5th, was open to the public and attended by over 60 members from all over the world.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS

**A Series on Human Rights
presented by Ezat
Mossallanejad, PhD., CCVT
Policy Analyst**



**Next Sessions: Human Rights,
Philosophy & Literature**

December 10th to honour the United Nations General Assembly's adoption and proclamation, on 10 December 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the first global enunciation of human rights and one of the first major achievements of the new United Nations.

PLEASE REGISTER ON EVENTBRITE!

"I have been working with refugees and traumatized people since 1980. I joined CCVT as a Director on the Board in 1992 and as a staff Counselor in 1997. Presently, I work with the Centre simultaneously as a Settlement Counsellor and Policy Analyst. Apart from providing clients with face-to-face trauma counselling, I have acted as the editor of the First Light, the bi-annual journal of the CCVT.

Prior to working with the CCVT, I was working as a Youth Counsellor with St. Christopher House and as the Coordinator of the Jesuit Refugee Service-Canada.

I have served as the editor and a member of the Editorial Board of Refugee Update and the Chair of the Board of Culturelink and a Board member of the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees. I am one of the founding members of the Canadian Centre for International Justice (CCIJ).

I have given lectures on torture and trauma in various colleges and universities in and outside Canada. I have served as a part-time professor of Immigration, Trauma, Diversity and Social Policy at Seneca College.

I am the author of books such as Torture in the Age of Fear (2005), Religions and the Cruel Return of Gods (2012) and Crimes and Punishment in Islam (2014).

I have closely worked with different United Nations bodies and in my mission for protection of refugees and survivors, I have travelled to different countries including USA, Mexico, Rwanda, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, Nigeria, Uganda, Thailand, India and Cyprus."



CANADIAN CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

**YOU ARE CORDIALLY
INVITED TO CCVT'S:**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**DECEMBER 17, 2020
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**

Please register with Ismail at ielnour@ccvt.org

HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM & VOLUNTEER CONNECTIONS EDITOR:

We wish you all the best for the upcoming Holidays and as well as a Happy New Year. May 2021 be better than 2020! and that we will see each other in person soon! Thank you for all the assistance you have provided CCVT this past year. **We couldn't have done it without you.**

Huda Bukhari, Ismail Elnour Juliette Ntege and Ori Barbalat

