

# THE LIBERTAS CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Newsletter | July 2016

## Center Update

The Libertas Center recently commemorated the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, and reflected on the strength and ability of our clients to overcome great challenges. By persevering and making their way to the Libertas Center, survivors have already taken the courageous and crucial step to seek out the support they need to gain independence and begin recovery. We are proud of the role we play in helping our clients to build a new life. According to Libertas Center follow up data, nearly 90% of clients report better medical and mental health and improved quality of life 6 months after intake. The Libertas Center has had a busy few months, including hosting a South Korean delegation of rehabilitation providers and organizing our second Photovoice exhibit. We're happy to share these and other exciting developments below.

- Dinali Fernando, Medical Director & Matthew Kennis, Program Director

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## Welcome Matt!

In February, the Libertas Center hired Matthew Kennis as the new Program Director. Matthew previously worked with Amnesty International USA and Human Rights Watch, and has advocated for torture prevention mechanisms for many years, in both the US and abroad. We are excited to have Matt join our team!



## Thank you Braden!

Braden, the Libertas Center Associate Medical Director, will be moving to Chicago to join Rush University as the Program Director for their new Emergency Medicine Residency Program. We thank him for everything he has done to build and grow Libertas.

## A Client's Photovoice Experience

The Libertas Center, in collaboration with the LGBT Center in Manhattan, displayed a series of photographs and narratives taken by LGBT survivors of torture in the exhibit "Finding Truth". The project aimed to decrease social isolation, build creativity, and draw awareness to participants' strengths. One of the five participants said this about



their experience: "I was very excited about participation in Photovoice project and skeptical at the same time. I'm so glad I made a decision to open myself to others through pictures. If someone told me before that it would be a life changing decision, I wouldn't even hesitate for a moment. And more than that I'm thankful to the organizers who during that period of time were making sure we feel safe and heard." Thank you to all who attended and supported Photovoice!

## Social Work Intern's Reflections



(Above) Walter - Therapist, Liz - Clinical Case Manager, and Josephine - Social Work Intern

This past year I interned at Libertas and would describe it as a life changing experience working with this special immigrant population. As the social work intern, there was a large capacity to grow both in programming and individual counseling. I was able to assess the needs of the clients and create an ESL program, which I monitored over the year. In addition, I got to see four ongoing clients for individual counseling. Libertas allowed me to understand the importance of healing trauma survivors from an integrative system perspective of micro to macro levels. The clients I saw came from all over the world with unique circumstances and taught me so much from their experiences abroad. At times, it may be difficult to communicate due to language barriers, but through gradual trust building the clients spoke to me about their stories. In those moments of their personal story, I would feel pain and sadness for all they had suffered through, but at the end of the day my supervisor reminded me that it is hope and their resilience that brought them here. From here on out, there will be hope for a better future in the US for these clients. Every day after internship I look back at what I have done and am so grateful that the clients were willing to share their stories with me, as hard as it is to share the past. The things I learned from both Libertas staff and clients have made me realize why I love doing the work that I do with this population.

- Josephine Tong, Social Work Intern, Columbia University School of Social Work

### Standing with Refugees and Survivors of Torture

*"Every minute, 24 people leave everything behind to escape war, persecution, or terror"*

*-United Nations*

In honor of June 20th, World Refugee Day, and June 26th, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, we stand with the 21.3 million refugees, 3.2 million people in the process of seeking asylum, and 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own countries. An estimated 100,000 survivors of torture are currently living in the NY Metro Area.



The Libertas Center hosted providers from South Korea who work with North Korean defectors to discuss care provision to torture survivors.



Medical Student Alice Shen presented her analysis of Mental Health Utilization by Libertas Clients at the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs 2016 Symposium.



The Libertas Center conducted a group training for Emergency Medicine and Psychiatry residents interested in providing forensic evaluations for asylum seekers.



Liz, Clinical Case Manager, participated in the Elmhurst Hospital Schwartz Rounds, "Don't I Deserve Love?", in May.

*Thank you to all our supporters.*

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