

THE LIBERTAS CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2016

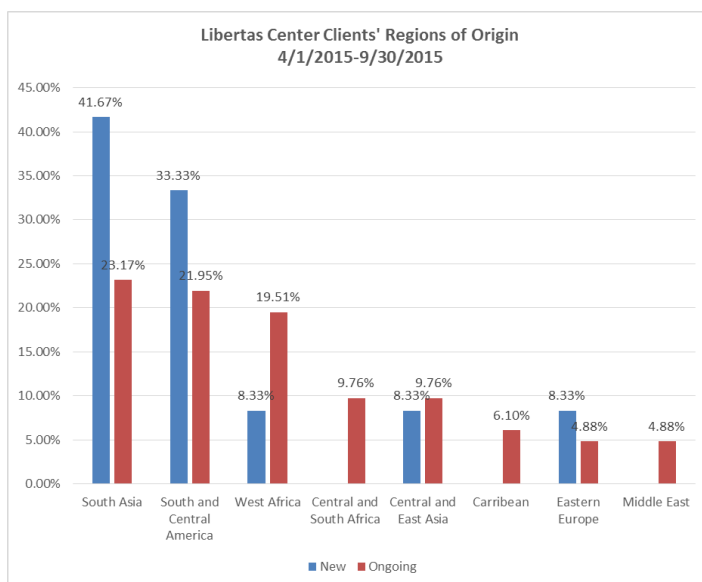


CENTER UPDATE

Dinali Fernando, M.D. M.P.H

As the Libertas Center enters our seventh year of providing services to survivors of torture, we are happy and grateful to have received renewed funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement from 2015 – 2018, as well as continued funding from the United Nations and our local City Council Member Daniel Dromm. As I reflect on our work over the past few years, I realize how much our staff has learned and grown individually and together as a group. We have learned that advocating for the rights of our clients happens with every interaction that we have in our work from the micro to the macro level. We have learned about making decisions that will impact others; about making others feel valued and heard; and as our former Program Director Leah said, we have “learned more about accepting uncertainty, and the importance of having a strong sense of *hope*. This is partly through the vicarious resilience gained from working with our clients.” We aim to channel this ongoing growth as an organization into continued and enhanced support for clients and each other, as we look forward to the exciting year ahead with many new developments in our program! We want to thank each of you for being there for our clients, and wish you a new year filled with joy and peace.

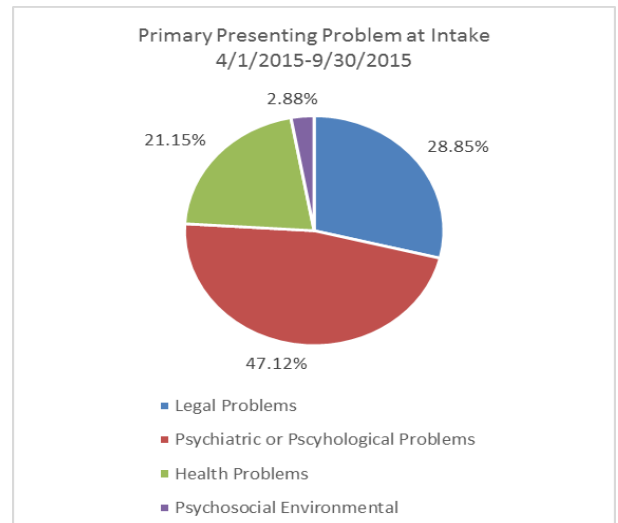
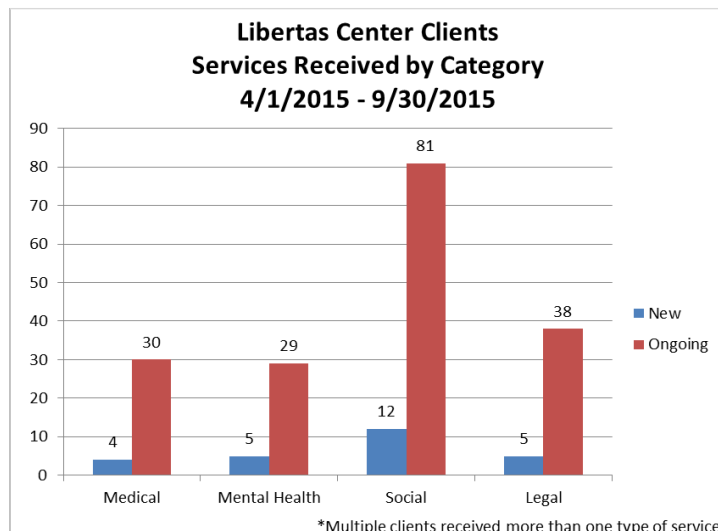
LIBERTAS IN NUMBERS



In the last six months, the Libertas Center has seen 104 new and ongoing clients. Our resilient clients come from different parts of the globe and varying walks of life. Most of our new clients from the last 6 months come from South Asia and South, Central America.

Clients present with a number of needs, the greatest being Psychological. needs over the past 6 months. The Libertas Center's takes a holistic approach to addressing these needs through the provision of multi-disciplinary services

- 55 % Men 44% Women
- Most clients are between the ages of 25-44 at intake.
- 90% of clients were asylum seekers at intake.
- 6 clients who received an affidavit in support of their asylum case won asylum in the last 6 months!
- 84% of clients reported overall improvement after 6 months of services.



All new clients receive social services through the Libertas Case Manager. At intake, our case manager, a licensed social worker, meets with clients to develop a relationship and understand each client's complex needs.

Through the support at Elmhurst Hospital, we refer to and coordinate with clinics in the hospital to address our clients' health issues and concerns.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Makini Chisolm-Straker, MD MPH is a Sinai EM Residency graduate and completed an International Emergency Fellowship at Columbia University Medical Center. She has worked administratively, clinically, consulted and/or performed field research in the Dominican Republic, Liberia, Haiti, Guatemala, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and most recently, Sierra Leone. Dr. Chisolm-Straker has been volunteering at Libertas since 2009, performing and writing medical and psychological exams and affidavits, respectively, for survivors of torture seeking asylum in the US. She is also co-founder of HEAL Trafficking, an international organization of health professionals working against human trafficking.

“Serving at Libertas is kind of like emergency medicine in that it's about the stories and the people in the stories. In this line of service, you hear and see the horrible things that people can do to hurt each other. These horrors are no longer surprising to me. How these survivors still have enough hope to seek asylum and to trust me with their story, that is what is impressive. I'm not strong enough to survive what they did, and still keep my humanity. But I'm honored to stand behind them, bearing witness, as they tell their truth and choose life.”

Thank you, Makini for being one of our longest standing volunteers and a huge supporter!!

CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

*Rani * (name changed) has been a patient at the Libertas Center since 2013. At Libertas, she received an affidavit by our Therapist and social services and health services at Elmhurst Hospital.*

My name is Rani, born and raised up in the remote areas of Pakistan. I was passionate to get education from my childhood so never gave up, even after I was married as a teenager. I was stopped three times from attending school. I continued my education, graduated from a well-known university in Pakistan and became a teacher educator. I got a greater respect in my community and the society that I came across. My institution gave me opportunities to share my learning as a woman and as a leading woman leader, at national and international conferences. I also worked in 32 government and non-government schools in giving on the job training to teachers. However, life is never straight. In a challenging and male dominated society, there is always a fear that would step you back. This is what happened to me. A stage came to my life that I had to give up everything and move to United States of America.

The biggest challenge in America was my social status. I was kind of hidden literate person. It was a kind of gold that someone would hide and would never utilize because of the rate of the low currency in the market. It was very hard to work and make a living so I had to work in stores and as a baby sitter to support myself and my children financially. Being away, from my children was another challenge. Every time, I would ask myself, what if I go back what would happen or if I stay, how would I find a way to my life? Will I be able to see my children ever and how? The third issue was people taking advantages of me such as paying low and threatening me. Some of my people, tried to manipulate me to damage my wellbeing/ status. The movement was so much depressing that I had depression.



I was a patient of Elmhurst Hospital so when I visited my doctor, I told him about my suicide thoughts when he wanted to figure out the reason for my high blood pressure. The doctor referred me to the social worker within the hospital and she referred me to Libertas Center. Libertas Center worked with my lawyers and followed up with me all the times so I felt at home where I felt comfortable to share my pains. The case manager became my emotional supporter who listened to me and I trusted her in sharing information. In a way, Libertas center opened a window of opportunity and hope. As I followed their directions, I felt, I gradually enhanced my confidence and faith in myself. I felt, I can do it. So it helped me to focus on my future goals and put my thoughts and dreams into reality.

Now, I have my green card and am working as a lead teacher in a school in NYC. I want to settled down with my daughters and assist them to follow my pathway to a successful life; I want to show my daughters how to be strong and fight for their rights. I also want to show my sons how to respect woman without underestimating woman. Women can find their ways if they are respected and valued. Women can work independently to be successful in life. I also want to show the girls and women who followed my pathway, that they should believe in themselves and should not give up. If circumstances are too hard, get help to find a way. "Never give up" would be my message. I also want to serve my new country as an American. I feel a proud American. I want to speak for it and would always demonstrate to create a harmony among the diversified culture of NYC for peace building. Lastly, I would like to thank Libertas Center for giving me this

[Visit NYC Health + Hospital's Patient Stories to read another client story!](#)

AROUND LIBERTAS



The Libertas Center was awarded the Leyton Award for championing unheard voices by [Houses on the Moon](#). The Libertas Center and Houses on the Moon have collaborated on performances that give voices to survivors of persecution. In the past, we hosted *De Novo*. Be on the lookout for future productions from this exceptional theater company!

(Below) In July the Libertas Center staff visited the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis, MN for the annual National Capacity Building Institute on Holistic Sustainability for Torture Rehabilitation Programs.



(Above) The Libertas Center said goodbye to Program Director, Leah Weinzimer. Since joining in 2010, Leah has grown Libertas in exponential ways. She is leaving the Libertas Center to be closer to family and although we miss her, we wish her the best of luck in her new adventures! Thank you, Leah, for your hard work and commitment to strengthening Libertas!

Support Us

By donating to the Libertas Center for Human Rights, you are helping to sustain valuable and irreplaceable services for survivors of torture.

Visit <https://philanthropy.mountsinai.org/libertas>

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Thank You! Gracias! Merci! Shukran!

to all our supporters, providers, volunteers.



Elmhurst



United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

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