Clients Experience the Power of Music

At SURVIVORS, we offer diverse forms of therapy to assist clients on their journeys toward healing and growth, including our newly launched music therapy program facilitated by a contract-ed board certified music therapist, who is originally from South Africa.

Music therapy instruments, generously funded by Thrivent Financial Action Team & San Diego Unified School District Community Services Association

Many organizations and institutions around the world recognize and apply the benefits of music therapy in their practices. Music transcends language barriers and social distance so the healing power of music cannot be underestimated.

Although SURVIVORS’ clients are deeply affected by their torture experiences, research shows that music therapy provides many benefits for trauma survivors such as lowering stress and reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder while elevating a positive mood.

Currently, our music therapy sessions are offered virtually. During these virtual group therapy sessions, clients play instruments provided by SURVIVORS and learn new songs from each other. Trauma often prevents torture survivors from connecting with other individuals. While our clients are ethnically and culturally diverse, sharing music allows participants to learn about one another’s cultures and form friendships, fostering a sense of unity.

As a client from West Africa shared, “It’s therapeutic for me. It helps me to get out of the numb. It’s fun, so much fun and it’s beautiful.” Through SURVIVORS’ music therapy, participants are free to express themselves as they wish. When individuals are tortured, they are deprived of their autonomy. Our program creates a nurturing environment that respects clients’ autonomy and cultures, which is an essential step to help them begin to regain trust in people once again and to rebuild their lives.

SURVIVORS Advocates For New County of San Diego Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs

SURVIVORS is pleased to announce that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors voted to approve the creation of the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs. The new office will act as a central hub, connecting individuals and families to resources and services in San Diego County. Community members will be encouraged to identify gaps in services for the county to address.

SURVIVORS’ program manager, Dr. Mahvash Alami, advocated on behalf of our clients for the creation of this new county office. During the June 8th San Diego County Board of Supervisors’ meeting, Dr. Alami was asked about the importance of such an office and described how “this office will be an important resource to help coordinate services and programs for vulnerable people who need assistance and a friendly face to begin their life in a strange land.” Our therapists, case managers, and volunteers continue to be some of the friendly faces that refugees and asylum seekers see when they arrive in the San Diego border region.

Torture survivors who arrive in San Diego County are often overwhelmed from being in a new country and culture. However, they are not alone. With our assistance, our clients learn about the culture of the United States, have support to enroll their children in school, receive guidance for the job market and help with securing a place to live. We also provide our clients with much needed mental health services. In support of this mission, we are happy to see the San Diego County Board of Supervisors continuing to make San Diego County welcoming for all San Diegans.
SURVIVORS Plans to Expand Into Imperial County

We are pleased to announce that we will be providing psychological and medical evaluations for clients in Imperial County who need forensic documentation for their asylum cases. Located to the east of San Diego County, next to the border of Arizona, Imperial County is home to the Imperial Regional Detention Facility in Calexico. Imperial County is geographically isolated from the rest of Southern California due to mountain ranges and desert, making access to many services difficult for its residents. The isolation of being in detention compounded by their location in Imperial County places additional strain on the asylum seekers in the facility. Elizabeth Lopez, an immigration attorney and SURVIVORS board member, works directly with detainees and describes how “My clients feel separated from the outside world in this desolate area which brings on feelings of helplessness and retriggers their trauma. To have someone to tell their fears and emotions to is maybe some of the only evidence we will have of the trauma suffered in their home country”. By expanding into Imperial County, SURVIVORS will be providing the first support of its kind in the region, lessening our client’s sense of isolation and supporting their asylum cases.

Unfortunately, the challenges for Imperial County do not end there. Detained asylum seekers in the county have little to no services available to support their mental health, medical well-being, and asylum cases. This presents an opportunity for SURVIVORS to directly serve clients in Imperial County, utilizing a similar model as in San Diego County with a network of professionals providing psychological and medical evaluations. Based on ongoing requests from the legal community currently assisting detainees, the planned expansion builds equity to ensure that these communities receive the care they deserve. The challenges Imperial County present will not disappear anytime soon; however, we look forward to bridging the divide between the two counties through serving clients in detention in Imperial County in the near future.

Volunteers Help Vulnerable Clients Get Vaccinated

Getting the COVID-19 vaccinations has been challenging for some San Diegans, and especially for our clients. For the communities that we serve, SURVIVORS is a trusted source of information about COVID-19 and the vaccines. Our goal has been to keep clients informed and supported throughout the pandemic. We continue to provide accurate and timely instructions from public health leaders to clients and their families.

Through our COVID-19 vaccination campaign, SURVIVORS’ trained and experienced volunteers have been calling clients and their families in Arabic, Spanish, and English to educate them about the benefits of vaccination. When asked about her experience as a volunteer, Sasha Moore explained, “Many clients said that they wanted the vaccine, but they didn’t know how to get an appointment or where to go. This really highlighted the need not only for accessible healthcare, but also the need for assistance in navigating a complex healthcare system through an organization that clients can trust.” Volunteers create a safe environment to address client’s questions about vaccinations. This level of trust has allowed volunteers to reassure clients about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines.

As part of our COVID-19 program, SURVIVORS sends emails and printed informational brochures, resource sheets, videos, and even child-friendly education pamphlets in multiple languages. Fully-vaccinated volunteers help drive clients to their vaccination appointments. The ongoing COVID-19 education program started in April 2020 with the vaccination campaign starting in February 2021. To date, we are pleased and relieved that no client under SURVIVORS care has died due to COVID-19.

Helping Survivors Heal Virtual Fundraiser

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2021

8 AM & 12 PM (you choose)

Registration information for online link to follow
Anonymous
Joyce Anderson
Kathi Anderson & Jesse Rivera
Jeanette Barrack
Steve & Carmen Berry
Candace Carroll & Len Simon
Maryann Dean & Bill Barlfitch
Jonathan Doering
Ann & Rich Durham

Denise Francis
Jan Galle
Jean Groves & Greg Olmstead
Lydia Grympa & Bob Oakley
Gregory Hall
Emily Hart & Philip Kuey
Rick & Ann Hein
Paula Herring & Tim Botsko

James Jaronson
Carl Josephson & Laura Harris
Melvin & Jane Kieshnick
Angela & Matthew Kilman
Rebecca LeVasseur
George & Karen Longstreth
Ann McDonald
Kate Miller

Matthew Molstrø
Gene Morones
Howard & Liwane Moseley
Tom & Brooke Nagle
Darrell Netherton & Robert Wheeler
Jan Neuhaus
Pat Olafson
Kathleen Owens

Sharon Payne
Natalie Pearl Ibarra
Sandra Peters
William & Martha Radatz
Grant Reeder
St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church,
San Diego
Richard & Tracy Vervia
Scott Williford

We apologize for any errors or omissions and extend our gratitude for support that may not have been recognized. Please contact us at 619-278-2400 for corrections.
We are saddened to share the news of the passing of Irene Cornish Thompson, LCSW, who died peacefully surrounded by her family from complications of COVID-19. Irene had contracted with SURVIVORS as a mental health clinician starting in 2009. Honoring her work, her family requested donations be directed to SURVIVORS.

Irene touched the lives of many people, helping them to survive, grow, heal from trauma, and thrive. She was a gifted therapist, educator and mentor who graciously gave her time and professional expertise to support SURVIVORS’ mission. She had a keen ability for connecting with everyone in a way that made them feel special. She will be missed.

Irene Cornish Thompson
July 15, 1942 - March 22, 2021

SURVIVORS Earns BBB Accreditation
For another year, SURVIVORS is proud to announce that we have met all the standards for the Better Business Bureau’s Standards for Charity Accountability. These standards are based on how charities are governed, spend their money, represent themselves, and disclose information to the public.

SURVIVORS is an IRS 501(C)(3) non profit. Eighty-six cents out of every dollar raised goes directly to SURVIVORS’ programs. Our Federal Tax ID number is 33-0743869

In 2021, SURVIVORS has served clients from 45 countries. Though we are located in the San Diego border region, home to the largest land border crossing in the world, and share a border with Mexico, this year has been historic as it is the first time in our 24 years that the largest percentage of our clients are from Latin America.

Clients by Region of Origin
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Regions Percent of Clients
Latin America 38%
Africa 34%
Middle East 17%
Asia 7%
Central & Eastern Europe 4%

Support SURVIVORS While Shopping at Ralphs
Raise money for SURVIVORS at no cost to you! When you use your Ralph’s card, a percentage of your purchase can be donated directly to SURVIVORS. Just link your account to benefit SURVIVORS. To enroll, go to www.ralphs.com and log in. Click on “Community Contributions” and search for “Survivors of Torture, International” or “AA669” then select “Enroll”. It’s that easy to make a significant impact in helping to fulfill our mission to make a significant impact in helping to fulfill our mission.