

## STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Cycles of violence can be disrupted by traditional human

rights approaches, but a peaceful environment can never be restored without first addressing the damage of repression on targeted individuals and the broader society. The tactics in this section aim to heal individuals and communities, beginning the complex task of creating cycles of positive events that pave the way for future progress.

Abuse that injures the individual also damages families and communities. It can destroy feelings of trust and security and can damage the institutions and relationships that allow us to rely on and support each other. Long-lasting and widespread patterns of abuse — whether under tyrannical regimes or during periods of civil conflict — can create large populations of displaced people and refugees and, even in communities that remain physically intact, can result in psychological devastation.

The tactics that follow include innovative ways of rebuilding communities and strengthening individuals whose lives have been affected by abuse. They include modern mental health interventions and techniques for rehabilitation (although the details of psychological treatment are outside the scope of this workbook), often combined with elements from traditional cultures. It is important to note that most, if not all, of these tactics draw support from within the community. A community devastated by conflict or tyranny may not seem to have many resources to draw upon. But recognizing and shoring up existing internal resources — whether they are cultural traditions or people with skills and potential they are eager to put to use — is essential to rebuilding that community.

The next three tactics focus on healing communities that have been torn apart by civil conflict, torture and displacement. Sometimes, especially following periods of civil war and tribal fighting, victims and perpetrators of abuse are forced to rebuild their lives side by side, in the same community. While it may seem most natural to focus on the needs of the victims while disregarding the abusers as evil, working with abusers can help fulfill important community needs.

## From Refugee to Mental Health Paraprofessional: Building local capacity for trauma-focused mental health services through an intensive training model.

TACTIC

The Center for Victims of Torture (which coordinates the New Tactics in Human Rights Project and published this book) is helping rebuild communities in which large portions of the population have suffered torture or war trauma and been forced to leave their homes.

The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) trains refugees as peer counselors in Guinea and Sierra Leone. The refugees provide mental health services to others who have suffered torture and war trauma, increasing the number of people CVT can serve and creating a cadre of qualified mental health paraprofessionals in communities that had previously had no mental health services. Paraprofessionals perform many of the tasks of professionals, but within a system of supervision.

The wars and civil conflicts in West Africa have affected such a large proportion of the population, and driven so many people into refugee camps, that an international organization like CVT could not possibly bring in enough staff to meet the need for mental health services. Instead, CVT decided to draw on resources within the camps, eventually recruiting more than 120 refugees as peer counselors, or psychosocial agents (PSAs), in camps in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

The refugee camps provide a concentrated area of survivors needing assistance, as well as a good location for the prolonged close supervision and training needed to assist torture survivors. Many of the PSAs received up to four years of ongoing training and daily supervision before the program moved into the communities where the atrocities were committed.

The intensive hands-on training in CVT's model combines Western psychotherapy with local understandings of trauma and recovery. The program begins with a two-week training session, followed by day-long monthly and seven-day quarterly training sessions. These sessions focus on trauma theory, general psychology, counseling, and communication skills. CVT psychologists and social workers work daily in the camps, modeling behavior and helping PSAs practice their skills. On the job, the PSAs spend ten weeks observing mental health professionals facilitating therapy groups, ten weeks co-facilitating and ten weeks leading a group on their own with periodic supervision. By the end of their training, PSAs are well-versed in the effects of trauma and in trauma recovery facilitation and program evaluation. They are also skilled group facilitators and effective communicators.

Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org), under Tools for Action.

ONLINE

Essentially, CVT is using this tactic to help a community heal itself. The refugees who train as PSAs are empowered as they learn new skills and do something positive for their community. The people they serve see that someone from their own community, rather than an outsider, is in a position to help them. And at the same time, people in the camps receive the mental health care they need.

While this tactic has been applied here to help victims of torture and war trauma, it could also be used to serve other populations with large numbers of people deeply affected by violence.

***Would the development of a cadre of paraprofessionals in the medicine, mental health or public health play a powerful role in your work? How might you develop this capacity?***

## Welcoming Child Soldiers Back Home: Combining traditional and Western healing techniques to reintegrate child soldiers into their former communities.

Child soldiers are victims, but often abusers as well. Some have been forced to commit horrendous crimes, sometimes against their own communities and families. This not only causes terrible psychological damage, but can make it exceedingly difficult for their families and communities to accept them back. In Mozambique, a group has used a tactic that requires a great deal of collaboration and trust among the child soldiers, the community and the traditional leaders and healers, and that supports the overall healing process by helping communities reintegrate their children back into community life.

Reconstruindo a Esperança (Rebuilding Hope), in Mozambique, combined traditional healing and Western psychology to reintegrate former child soldiers. Thousands of children were used as soldiers by both sides in Mozambique's devastating civil war. Lucrecia Wamba, a psychologist with Rebuilding Hope, states that "child soldiers lived through unimaginable horrors and they processed these experiences through the lens of the culture and belief systems of their communities. Their healing necessarily had to be processed through the same lens, in order to achieve both individual rehabilitation and community reintegration." The organization recognized that neither traditional healing methods nor individualized Western psychology alone would be sufficient to address the needs of the children or the community.

Rebuilding Hope first conducted a survey to identify communities that were facing problems with returning child soldiers and to identify community resources. Recognizing that traditional healers are often the first people community members approach when they need help, Rebuilding Hope psychologists enlisted the support of community leaders to build relationships with the healers.

In the community, psychologists examined the role traditional healing processes were playing in promoting reconciliation and reintegration and approached families to see what the children needed. At first, families were reluctant to trust the outsiders, fearing that their children would be taken from them yet again. The psychologists also went to local leaders, describing the effects of trauma and asking if they were seeing particular problems among the returning child soldiers and were able to address these problems. When leaders acknowledged that these problems were continuing, the psychologists offered to work collaboratively with the traditional healers.

Local leaders accompanied the psychologists on visits to healers to encourage cooperation. Psychologists and healers realized that their approaches could complement each other. To build trust within the community, Rebuilding Hope also needed to work with the communities to identify material priorities and gain material assistance, connecting the community to resources such as housing, education and agricultural tools.

The result was an integrated approach to healing in which healers and psychologists built a collaborative relationship, referring children to one another to achieve the best results possible.

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Former child soldiers present communities with complex issues that are, sadly, not unique to Mozambique. This tactic may be applicable in other communities working to reintegrate survivors of war, communities in which leaders and traditional healers can play significant roles and in which the abused and the abuser need to live together. To heal, a community must overcome the assumption that perpetrators of abuse are evil and cannot be reintegrated into society in any positive or meaningful way. Scarce resources can make it difficult to implement this tactic, particularly if community members feel that such resources would be better used to help victims rather than those who have perpetrated abuses.

“ ” We went to each healer accompanied by the first lady of the community. She was our entry into the healers' homes. She would be the first to speak, describing our desire to help. "They are doctors," she said. "They are here to help. I just brought them to you because I think they have something to offer us." The healers would then tell us what they were doing for the children and we would describe the educational

processes of our own discipline, focusing on the children and the community at large. We felt we could work together. If the healer can first wash away those evil spirits, then the children can come to us and we can help to build them up as men and women.

— Lucrecia Wamba, Rebuilding Hope, Mozambique

RESTORATIVE	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Strengthening Individuals and Communities <a href="http://www.newtactics.org">www.newtactics.org</a>	Africa	Civil Society	Society	National	Child soldiers

## Peacemaking Circles: Involving the community in determining offenders' sentences and helping to rehabilitate them.

Rarely do victims and offenders have the chance to sit together and discuss a crime in a way that allows the community both to heal and to help prevent future offenses. In communities in the United States and Canada, a tradition that has existed for centuries is being adapted to deal with contemporary justice issues.

Peacemaking circles use traditional circle ritual and structure to create a respectful space in which all interested community members — victim, victim supporters, offender, offender supporters, judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, police and court workers — can speak openly in a shared attempt to understand a crime, to identify what is needed to heal all affected parties and to prevent future occurrences. These circles are built on the tradition of talking circles, common among indigenous people of North America, in which an object called a talking piece is passed from person to person around a circle, structuring the dialogue.

Peacemaking circles are community directed processes that work in partnership with the criminal justice system. They typically involve a multi-step procedure including application by the offender to the circle process, a healing circle for the victim, a healing circle for the offender, a sentencing circle to develop consensus on the elements of a sentencing agreement and follow-up circles to monitor the progress of the offender. The sentencing plan may incorporate commitments by the system, community and family members as well as by the offender.

During circle gatherings, participants sit in a circle without tables or other furniture. Circles are facilitated by "keepers," often trained community members, who are responsible for setting a tone of respect and hope that supports and honors every participant. Participants may only speak when holding the talking piece, which is passed clockwise around the circle to provide an opportunity for every participant to speak. Because it designates who will speak and who must listen, the talking piece reduces the role of the facilitator and eliminates interruptions. It also creates space for the ideas of participants who would find it difficult to insert themselves into the usual dialogue process. Each participant is encouraged to add to the understanding of the problem and to generate possible solutions.

The process may first involve separate circles for the victim and offender in which participants determine an action plan to address issues raised in the process. By consensus the circle may develop the offender's sentence and may also stipulate responsibilities of community members and justice officials. After the circle process, regular communication and check-ins are used to assess progress and adjust agreements as conditions change.

Peacemaking circles are a way in which people from many different perspectives can come together to have difficult conversations about conflict, pain and anger while creating the space to honor the presence and dignity of every participant. In addition to supporting victims and assisting offenders in making life changes, peacemaking circles are also being used to develop plans for families in crisis, resolve conflict in schools and in the workplace and bridge gaps between cultures and generations.

Circles are not appropriate for all offenders. The connection of the offender to the community, the sincerity and nature of the offender's efforts to be healed, the input of victims and the dedication of the offender's support group primarily determine whether the case is appropriate for the circle process. Because communities vary in their

health and capacity to deal constructively with differences or conflict, the formal justice system participates in community sentencing circles to protect both victims and offenders from inappropriate community responses or power imbalances.

— Kay Pranis, Circle Trainer, United States

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Africa Americas	Government Civil Society	Society	Local	Peace	Strengthening Individuals and Communities <a href="http://www.newtactics.org">www.newtactics.org</a>

## Telling Stories Online: Creating a venue on the Internet for former child soldiers to share their stories and develop new skills.

New technologies provide an opportunity to build awareness about human rights violations.

Launched in 2000, the Child Soldier Project of the International Education and Resource Network in Sierra Leone (iEarn Sierra Leone) has created a web site on which former child soldiers can share their stories. The web site, [www.childsoldiers.org](http://www.childsoldiers.org), features the essays, poems, artwork and voices of former child soldiers and offers an on-line forum for discussion.

iEarn Sierra Leone visits schools, hospitals and camps, airs radio announcements and publishes newspaper articles to inform former child soldiers about the project. Participants are tutored in reading and writing, basic word processing and computer skills. They also receive trauma counseling from volunteer nurses and psychiatrists.

When participants become comfortable on a computer they use the web site to share their thoughts and experiences. Galleries of former child soldiers' accounts, drawings and voices have prompted support and solidarity from people around the world. An interactive forum allows participants to discuss and debate with fellow former child soldiers and others. Participants build confidence and learn skills that make it easier for them to create a place for themselves in society. To date, over 200 former child soldiers have participated in the project.

This tactic uses the Internet to help a scattered group of victims share their stories and connect with each other, and could be used in other cases where victims of abuse are dispersed or in which targeted minorities (e.g. people with disabilities or gays and lesbians) cannot talk about their experiences as easily in their own communities. The Internet can create a safe space for these people to connect with others who will understand. It is not always possible, however, to guarantee anonymity or security of personal information on the Internet.

This tactic clearly requires an adequate technological infrastructure, but by succeeding in Sierra Leone, a war-ravaged country ranked one of the poorest in the world, iEarn has proven that this obstacle can be overcome.

### How can you enable people to tell their own stories?

“ ” | *The children, some of whom are talented in various art forms, are able to rediscover their talents, which makes them believe that their lives can be improved. Their songs, artwork and music, as well as the enormous responses they receive from peers, become a catalyst for social justice and positive change.*

— Andrew Benson Greene, [childsoldiers.org](http://childsoldiers.org),  
Sierra Leone

## Bringing Hope to Children: Organizing summer camps to offer children a reprieve from violence.

In the West Bank a group is addressing the problem of trauma among children under occupation by providing them an opportunity to connect with other children in a peaceful environment.

The Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture (TRC) in Ramallah, in the West Bank, organizes a free summer camp to rehabilitate traumatized children. The camp offers recreational, artistic and rehabilitative activities intended to help children support one another and deal with their personal traumas and fears.

The Israeli military has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and ongoing violence in the region has psychologically affected the entire Palestinian population, creating a culture dominated by violence. Born into oppressive and stressful living conditions, most of the children in the West Bank have witnessed atrocities.

TRC established its summer camp to alleviate some of the hardships these children face and to provide a setting for rehabilitative care. TRC promotes the camps in nearby villages, in refugee camps and among its clients. Most of the children selected (about 60–70) suffer symptoms of anxiety, depression or loneliness because of their exposure to trauma; many have witnessed the death or torture of family members.

The summer camp meets daily for four to five hours over a period of three to four weeks. Transportation is provided to and from the camp and most often the camp is located close to where the children live. The participating children are divided into groups based on the level or kind of trauma they have suffered. Each child has a mentor to assist, listen, counsel and integrate him or her into the group of other children. Each child also has access to a psychiatrist, psychologist and social worker. The first and last three days of the summer camp are usually dedicated to projects such as drawing, artwork and sports. The rest of the days are focused on group work, such as group dynamics and counseling, play and art therapy. Medical and behavioral reports are maintained in order to evaluate the camp's impact on each child.

Based on evaluation forms filled out by parents and counselors, many children leave the camp with fewer anxiety symptoms, fewer violent behaviors and more openness and are more integrated into their communities. During the drawing projects, children are asked to draw pictures representing their environments or hopes for the future. Most often, initial drawings portray dark images or colors. Final drawings, however, show a change in attitudes and hope about the future.

The camps give the children an opportunity to step out of the violence of their day-to-day lives and explore different ways of dealing with trauma without using violence themselves. The camps also offer a release for children, a place where they can come to express themselves through play and art, while at the same time receiving rehabilitative services.

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Strengthening Individuals and Communities <a href="http://www.newtactics.org">www.newtactics.org</a>	Africa	Civil Society	Society	National	Child soldiers

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	RESTORATIVE
Asia	Civil Society	Society	Local	Children's rights	Strengthening Individuals and Communities <a href="http://www.newtactics.org">www.newtactics.org</a>

## Local Ownership of History: Documenting oral testimony to create a written history to help people in isolated communities understand the full extent of the war crimes suffered in their country.

History is traditionally written by those in power. Victims of abuse — whether they are poor communities or civilians caught in the middle of a civil war — rarely have their say, even after the abuse has ended. A group in Guatemala brings isolated communities ravaged by war into the process of writing that war's history. The concrete outcome of the work was a written report, but the report's creation began a process of reconciliation at the local level and gave a voice to people who would otherwise have remained silent.

As part of the ongoing REMHI (Recovery of Historical Memory) Project, several dioceses of the Catholic Church in Guatemala mobilized their members to collect testimonies from victims of state violence. These testimonies were compiled in a report used to return that history to the affected communities and individuals.

During Guatemala's 36-year civil war, nearly 200,000 people were killed, disappeared or suffered other human rights abuses, primarily by state security forces. The REMHI Project began in 1994, one year before the 1995 Peace Accords, as an initiative of the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala, under the leadership of Archbishop Juan Gerardi. While a truth commission had been outlined as part of an earlier Peace Accord, it had not been established, and the church felt that the commission would be unable to meet expectations due to extreme divisions and the degree of violence suffered by the society.

REMHI therefore decided to use the structure of the church and the enormous network of people associated with it to open a space for dialogue on the violence, and to facilitate the work of a future truth commission. The church publicized the project through posters, flyers and radio spots. Each participating parish nominated two parishioners as "facilitators of reconciliation." REMHI's approach differed from other reconciliation efforts in its grassroots mobilization of individuals, especially victims of the violence, who often served as facilitators. Across the country, close to 800 facilitators collected and analyzed testimonies from 5,000–7,000 people who had suffered violence, torture or the loss of a family member. Since the violence was ongoing, the collection of testimonials was carried out at great risk to the church and its members.

Analysis of the testimonies demonstrated that state security forces were responsible for most of the human rights abuses during the war. A final report, *Guatemala: Never Again*, was released in four volumes and presented to the public on April 24, 1998. Tragically, Archbishop Gerardi was assassinated two days after the report was released; military personnel were later convicted for his death.

Despite the Archbishop's death, many of the same facilitators have continued the project. They have presented participating communities with project results, helping place individual and community experiences into a historical and national context. When translations become available in local languages, participants are given copies of a popularized version of the report, meant to be read aloud in group discussions. From the report, they learn that what happened to them was not their fault and that it happened to many throughout the country. Facilitators have also assisted communities in their reconciliation efforts, contributing to the construction of a culture of peace by promoting nonviolent methods to resolve conflict. This process has occurred in conjunction with the ongoing exhumations and reburial of victims' remains, which form an important part of the healing process in Mayan culture. REMHI has also contributed to work of the Guatemalan truth commission (the Commission for Historical Clarification), supporting witnesses and the participation of community organizations and providing testimony.



REMHI's tactic could be used to facilitate or contribute to the work of a truth commission in other countries, or could be used in situations where no truth commission exists, or where those most affected by human rights abuses cannot participate in processes like commissions and litigation.

In Guatemala this tactic was effective largely because of the extensive institutional structure and reach of the Catholic Church. Without a pre-existing, trusted network it would be difficult to gather personal stories on this scale. Funding is also necessary; in Guatemala, financial resources were limited and work was distributed among the individual dioceses.

This tactic can be risky. Many of the human rights violators remain in positions of authority in the army and government, and the army and paramilitaries have responded with threats and even assassinations of those associated with the project.

*How might people in the local communities be actively engaged in your reconciliation process?*