

TRAUMA HEALING REPORT—RWANDA APRIL TO JULY, 2003

By Adrien Niyongabo, Trauma Healing Work, Coordinator

After the one-month training program held at the Friends Women's Garden Center in February and March 2003, a need for the planning of further activities was evident. To that end, the fifteen trauma healers, David Bucura and Marcelin Sizeli (the Legal Representative and Clerk, respectively, for the Rwanda Yearly Meeting), David Zarembka and Cecelia Yocum (from AGLI) and Adrien Niyongabo (from Burundi Yearly Meeting) gathered on 28 March 2003. In that meeting, four full time staff members and an Executive Committee of seven people were chosen for the Trauma Healing Works. Also, a three-month program, focused primarily on conducting 26 three-day trauma-healing workshops, was set up and Adrien Niyongabo was appointed as the Coordinator for that program. The activities officially started on the 24 April 2003 and ended on 24 July 2003. Thus, let's have a look on what happened in between.

You may have a pencil and Rwanda map with you! If you don't, it doesn't matter. Only, make yourself ready to join us in our journey. You will be with gentle facilitators, who have dedication for their work. Friends Peace House (FPH) will be our starting- point and for each time we will make a round-trip.

From FPH:

- Go to Kagarama
- Go to Ruhengeri
- Go to Gitarama and to Kagarama
- Go, in two separate ways, to Kibuye and Cyangugu
- Go, in four different ways, to Gisenyi, Kibungo, Ruhengeri and Kagarama
- Go to Gisenyi, Byumba, Kibungo and Kagarama
- Go, in four different journeys, to Cyangugu, Gitarama, Ruhengeri and Kagarama
- Go to Kigali-Ngali, Ruhengeri, Gisenyi and Kagarama
- Go, gently to Kibuye, Kagarama and Cyangugu.

How was it? Did you realize that you have been in 9 provinces out of the 12 of Rwanda? Yes, you have been there and in a total of the 25 three-day trauma healing workshops, you met and trained 490 people, interested, active men and women, struggling with their heavy traumas. Those who attended these workshops, essentially composed by young adults, came from different background: genocide survivors, released prisoners, Batwa and community, church, and local association leaders.

In each workshop, several key topic areas were covered: understanding trauma, including trauma definitions, causes and symptoms; effects of trauma on a person; listening skills; understanding loss and grief; dealing with anger; and trust and mistrust. These modules were set up with the help of Cecilia Yocum, from AGLI. Small group

sharing was also included, to provide participants with an opportunity for deep sharing. Also, some “light and livelies” were provided in the workshops. Though the schedule was very tight, facilitators were able to attend a three-day in-service training session under the leadership of David Cimborá, Ph. D., from Biola University in La Mirada, California. We had also two days of group clinical supervision.

Trauma Healing Works’ (THW) facilitators were blessed to meet with very enthusiastic audiences in each of the places where workshops were held. The primary message was helping participants to understand that trauma is not a shameful word or name. Neither are the traumatized persons. Respect was given to whoever was in the room. Information was shared with simplicity and no ambiguity. Connection was established among the entire group, laughing together and being mutually supportive of crying. New ways to restore hope were sought. All were overjoyed to see how these simple trauma healing modules, used by non-professional trauma workers, have impacted and enriched lives and have thereby started a path to healing. It has been clear that these workshops were highly appreciated by the participants as their specific needs were effectively responded to. As comments demonstrate, participants did not hide their satisfaction about getting the skills that helped them to better understand what they have been going through and how to deal with its consequences:

- ❖ I didn’t realize that I was traumatized. I was surprised to find myself with many of these trauma symptoms you told us. Thank you so much for helping me to know what I am suffering from.
- ❖ We were blind. Learning about Trauma Healing skills has allowed us to shed light on our past, present and our future. Personally, I realize that the fact that we have been bearing all the bad events in us has brought back the violence once again. If we had known that before, I ensure you that the situation in our country would have been different.
- ❖ In this workshop, I have discovered that there are many kinds of trauma. Before, I was thinking that only having lost family members is traumatizing. But now, I have seen that the wrongdoer can be traumatized by the horrible things she/he did.
- ❖ Being in the group, where you talk about your stories, is comforting. Hearing someone else’s story, you could realize that you are not alone in the struggle. And when it came to telling others about your story, it was like some thing heavy was pulled out from the heart and you felt happy.
- ❖ Having participated in this workshop, it has lifted me to another stage of understanding. I have a neighbor with whom I am in conflict. I discovered how I have been acting under my anger. Now, I am ready to meet with him and tell him that I have acted wrongly. I will ask for forgiveness. Yes, I have been an evildoer.
- ❖ We were forgotten and marginalized for years and years. I am thankful, not only me but also the other Batwa I came with, to those who invited us to attend this

workshop. The happiness I received from this workshop is unforgettable for it was my first time, since I was born, to reach that stage of happiness. Praise the Lord!

- ❖ I thank God for having been invited in this workshop. Since 1994, I could not have a quiet sleep night and day. But, after the 2nd day of our workshop, I slept like a baby. It was a new good-morning again after such a long time!!!! If you keep coming to our communities with these workshops, I tell you the truth, you will prevent many from becoming mad (said a 60 year-old grandmother).
- ❖ For sure, the more you talk about the story, the more you come to end with the experience and less painful your emotions will be.

Some difficulties were observed during our work. In some of our workshops, only two facilitators had to conduct the training because some of the other facilitators could not get permission from their employers. For logistical reasons, many of those who heard about the workshops and came without being invited were sent back home. Many times, facilitators had to travel back and forth, mornings and evenings, because the lodgings and the workshop facilities were not in the same compound. Also, one of the 26 workshops scheduled had to be cancelled because of budget constraints caused by increased prices. The main difficulty was the fact that follow-up after the workshops could not be planned. If this follow-up system had been set up, it would have allowed THW to be in contact with many of those who attended the previous workshops during their own healing process. In that way, the old victims would become the new helpers for others in need of healing.

In all of the workshops conducted, participants expressed their deep willingness to have further training, for themselves and for others who did not come. In addition to that request, specific groups (orphans, demobilized soldiers, HIV/AIDS people, widows, and others) asked for specific training. The Batwa case had also attracted the attention of the facilitators. In fact, as Batwa have been discriminated for a long time and suffered from many other injustice systems, a particular care would be envisioned. On behalf of the facilitators, their main request has been for more in-service training, as they need to shape their knowledge.

We express our deepest gratitude to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) for their financial support since the beginning of the Trauma Healing Work in Rwanda. With their grants, we have been capable of meeting with all those people who, for a long time, had that hunger and dryness for trauma healing skills.

It is worthy to congratulate all those young facilitators who afforded the three-day workshops with courage and abnegation. They made themselves available and ready to facilitate the workshops whenever they were asked to do so although they were volunteers. They have given their time and accepted to be away from their lovely families. They conducted the workshops without fear and made themselves humble in all the circumstances. This commitment contributed a lot to the success of the scheduled

activities. THW staff also merit special appreciation for their great efforts in managing the tasks that were given to them. Particular thankfulness to the THW executive committee members for their so many valuable advises in how to manage the program, day by day. We need to recognize the remarkable role of the Friends Church in Rwanda regarding to the administrative and logistic facilities offered to THW. The needed papers were sent to the local government administration leaders, churches and classrooms were given to us for the workshops to take place in. We express our deepest thanks to AGLI/FPT for their considerable involvement in the implementation of the Trauma Healing Work in Rwanda and ongoing support to Peace activities done by Friends in the African great lakes region. We address our sincere thanks to all those who, from near or far, have played any role in the accomplishment of our activities.

With all these efforts, THW was able to go forward. Our success has come from a group effort. Let us all together be happy!!!

