

FIELD REPORT: KENYA July 2009

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TRI's work in Africa which began in 2005 is continuing. On this trip we have been invited to Kenya by Gloria Simoneaux, a Fullbright scholar and expressive art therapist from California. She invited TRI to come and share The Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM) with the children and adults she works with in the slums and prison. Gloria has also connected TRI to the Kenyan Association of Professional Counselors (KAPC) who has invited us to do a full three-day, TRM training.

The KAPC TRM1 training is filled to overflowing with participants from several African countries. Some people have to be turned away but we are planning to return in spring 2010 and will offer another TRM 1 as well as a Level 2 TRM.

The Kibera Slum, the largest slum in Kenya and in existence since 1918, is our first destination the morning of our arrival from London. When we arrive, our escorts into the slum are a group of enthusiastic children that rush Gloria's car in excitement to see her and her assistant, Sofia Cosas. Gloria has been developing a project with a group of artists from the slum who have formed an art collaborative. Solo, the lead artist, Gloria and her assistant, Sofia, encourage artistic expression with some of the children in the Kibera Slum. One of their projects is to create colorful paintings on large sheets of corrugated metal, the main building material in Kibera. As we walk around Kibera we see how much the painted panels brighten the surroundings. They are doors and the sides of buildings. Gloria and Sophia are committed to the work they are doing and it clearly is demonstrated by the expression of affection from the children towards both of them.

The children delight in the artwork and with great deliberation and joy create their masterpieces on old pieces of wood and tin. They all are enthusiastic about our cameras and encourage us to take many

pictures of them so that they can view their own images on our digital cameras.

One of the artists gives us a tour of the slum, and although much of it is littered with debris as we walk around Kibera we see how much the painted panels from Gloria's project brighten the surroundings. They are doors and the sides of buildings. Although the evidence of acute poverty is everywhere in evidence we hear singing, laughter, and witness industry---beauty parlors, a movie theater, a bead making shop, people washing clothes and cutting hair, selling vegetables, and caring for children. We are repeatedly invited for lunch by people who are curious about these white westerners. Although there is the dynamic energy of the human spirit in the slum, there is also great tragedy. There are many public health concerns (sanitation, clean drinking water) and HIV has ravaged the community. Many children have been left orphaned and many have HIV from birth transmission. The visit to the slum creates a theme that we will see repeated throughout our stay – the vitality of the human spirit and the tragedy of poverty, disease and the lack of resources.

Linda Wilson, the founder of Caring for Kids of Kenya, has asked us to work at the orphanage she sponsors, Shelter Children's Center, and at a school that teaches the orphans, Saint Elizabeth's Academy. During our stay we make two separate visits to the school because the teachers are eager to learn the beginning TRM skills. It is exciting, as always, to watch as people learn the stabilization skills that can help their students as well as helping in their own self-care. The orphanage is in a beautiful, pastoral setting, near Ngong. It has goats and 10 cows, a great source of pride since the children are able to have milk twice a day. The orphanage houses 118 children between the ages of 3 and 21. We travel on dirt, deeply pitted roads to get there and have what is called, "the Kenyan Massage", as our bodies are tossed in every direction. At the orphanage, we share an introduction of TRM skills to the teachers, caregivers and social worker.

The two administrators orient us to their perspectives of the challenges of caring for and teaching children in Kenya. TRI's goal is to create sustainability models of care with regard to treating trauma. It is clear that the administrators have great compassion and work

long hours to care for the children and to address the challenges that for many are a result of shock and developmental trauma. Many of the children in the orphanage have experienced great trauma and they show us a small video clip of one of the children having a traumatic flashback. Knowing that traditional talk therapy may have limited value, we address working with some of these symptoms in different ways to reframe the symptoms of the children from a biological perspective.

As we have worked around the world and sometimes only have a small window of time to teach and work, we have found introducing rudimentary concepts of the nervous system in simple ways and then to teach the basic skills of Tracking, Grounding and Resourcing. As Grounding and Resourcing can sometimes trigger activation, we also teach simple deactivation strategies. The orphanage Director asks us for ideas about dealing with the more severely traumatized children in her care.

We work with the younger children and older children using therapeutic games. Twenty-five smaller children between the ages of 5 and 7 are brought to us and we play the parachute games (incorporating a focus on activation, calming, safety and cooperation, as well as other games that work with activation and rebalancing of the nervous system. The children are full of enthusiasm and when we observe children who become “stuck on high” or “stuck on low”, we implement additional strategies to bring down the activation in the nervous system. The children learn to track their own nervous systems by placing their hands to the hearts and tracking when their heart rates are slowing down and speeding up. They teach us the Swahili words and then they are able to express them verbally as they sense into their bodies. The teen group we work with also learn these tracking skills as well as talking with us about the challenges of being teens in an orphanage where everyone feels like your brother and sister.

After working with the children, we meet with the teachers, caregivers and social worker who have observed the play. We discuss the theory behind the games in further detail and how they could continue with Grounding and Resourcing with the children.

The administrators report that our introduction had been one of the best trainings their workers had ever received and they invite us to come back to do the full training next spring.

We spend a day, along with Gloria Simoneaux and Sofia Cosas at the Langata Women's Prison, a prison for women who have received sentences of more than 5 years that is on the outskirts of Nairobi. We are working with a group of women in the HIV Support Group. We arrive as they are preparing lunch and we are invited to join in the cooking. They have big iron pots over fires and are preparing a staple in Kenya called Ugali...made of maize flour. We also help chop large bunches of kale to make Sukuma Wiki, which in swahilli means "push the week." It is one way the Kenyans make limited food last the full week. Gloria has brought a salsa teacher and we all have great fun dancing together. Before lunch is served we teach the women the skills of Grounding and Resourcing. We hope these stabilization skills can help the women face the difficult prison conditions and the separation from their families.

The last venue of work for TRI is at two camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). These camps were formed after the post-election tribal clashes a year and a half ago. We travel to the camps with Irene Ngatia, a dynamic young woman who has started a range of microfinance projects in the camps to help people become self-sufficient. Her non-profit, Volunteer International Community Development- Africa (VICDA) places volunteers in the IDP camps. Irene is the Country Program Director. The first camp, we arrive at, Camp Baruku, sits on top of a dry, dusty hill. The people, 250 families (1,000 people) are all living in tents, with no electricity and little water, and, it seems like, even less hope. It is a bleak scene. Irene has come to this camp to attempt to get some projects started; and she is trying to find funding that will bring building materials into the camp. We are quickly surrounded by children and gradually by adults as well. We will not be teaching in this camp so we talk with the people about the conditions and the kinds of things that are supportive in their lives.

At the second camp, Pipeline Nokuru Camp, the energy is very different. This camp is unique because a large group of families pooled the meager money given to them by the government (the

equivalent of about \$120) after the dislocation from their villages and bought a 16 acre parcel of land. The land the tents are on belongs to the 1250 family heads (about 6,000 people)...and we see little vegetable gardens trying to bloom in the dusty soil. Each family has their own plot of land. This provides a security not present in the other camp(s) since the government is trying hard to have people move from the camps to their original villages via an effort called "Operation Rudi Nyumbani" which means "operation go back home". The people told us, however, that there is no security back in their villages and the people who killed and destroyed property are still there. The head of Pipeline Nokuru camp says, "We're here to stay."

We provide a 2 hour training inside a UNICEF tent for the governing committee of the camp and all the teachers. We talk to them about the kinds of symptoms many are still experiencing, do a demonstration with one brave teacher who volunteers, and teach the skills of Grounding and Resourcing. Several days later we are surprised to receive an email from one of the participants saying that he has been practicing the "calming skills" and is noticing a difference. Small moments such as this make the hardships of travel worth every minute.

TRI is in the process of making plans and is fundraising in order to return to Kenya to further the training of the teachers and caregivers at the orphanage, the school, and the IDP camps. A very little in the way of money goes a long way and we hope anyone reading this will be inspired to make a donation to TRI's work in Africa.