

Torture Survivors Project

ASSAF – Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel (ASSAF), established in 2007, is a unique Israeli grassroots organization, providing Refugees and Asylum seekers in Israel with a safe haven in which they can finally feel welcome and at home, develop a sense of community and belonging, and access essential psychosocial, humanitarian and welfare support. Our approach is relationship-based and collaborative. At the heart of our work is a profound commitment to responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers while fostering empowerment, resilience and self-sufficiency among our beneficiaries at both the individual and community levels. ASSAF specializes in advocating for the rights of and providing refugees and asylum seekers with the knowledge, information and support necessary to achieve their rights, whilst simultaneously involving them as agents of change in all aspects of awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Treatment of Victims of Torture at ASSAF

ASSAF's team strives to fulfill the complex needs of the victims of torture and trafficking while offering a safe place for them to share their burden. ASSAF supports some **200** victims of torture; among them **70% are women**, survivors of the torture camps in the Sinai Peninsula. The services include: group empowerment sessions, individual sessions, referrals to relevant external services (mental and medical) and, if needed, to protective shelters.

It is estimated (by the Israeli CSO's) that there are over 7,000 victims of torture residing in Israel. The vast majority of these victims were released from Israeli detention centers (run by the prison's authority) without being assessed or recognized officially as victims of torture. These individuals are left to adjust to the difficulties of life in a foreign country with no legal status, rights or access to social services provided by the State of Israel. The long-term consequences of torture are complex, multidimensional, and pervasive. Torture leaves indelible scars in the mind, body, and cultural world of survivors. As such, ASSAF's rehabilitation program requires multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise. Through our comprehensive support program, ASSAF seeks to enable the victims of torture to rebuild their lives and reclaim their dignity and independence.

Victims of torture, as all refugees and asylum seekers face linguistic and cultural barriers in Israel and are often discouraged to seek help and support to any medical or emotional problem. This phenomenon is enhanced when refugees and asylum seekers are victims of torture. They are afraid to share their personal experience and trauma with friends and relatives due to the negative stigma, afraid of being out casted by their communities and are in tremendous debts to those who paid their ransom fees – friends and family members in Israel, Eritrea and the diaspora. Coping with the trauma alone, with no institutional, formal or informal support network is destructive and harms the survivor's ability to develop resilience and coping mechanisms.

ASSAF's team of professional psychosocial team and trained volunteers offers the survivors various therapeutic methods tailored to their needs and their resilience: group or individual sessions, storytelling, referrals to protective shelters etc. The most fundamental aspect of our work is the friendly shoulder we offer the victims to lean on, helping restore the survivors trust in others and reduce their sense of isolation, elevating their hardship .

Psychosocial support is essential in the Israeli context where victims of torture are left to cope on their own, with no institutional support or access to welfare services, unlike Israeli patients who receive support and guidance from social workers and institutional specialists. The psychosocial support team introduces the survivors to the available services offered by other CSO's and institutions and coordinated medical

procedures when needed. Our experience proves that psychosocial support improves the resilience of the supported victims of torture and their ability to overcome the trauma and regain self-esteem and dignity.

In addition to treating individuals who have volunteered information about the torture that they underwent, ASSAF receives referrals of victims of torture from lawyers, social workers, and physicians in other organizations. These individuals are invited to ASSAF for an intake counseling session with the social worker and treatment plans are devised according to their wishes and needs. ASSAF will never obligate an asylum seeker in any therapeutic process and any treatment plan which is devised is developed with the full participation of the client.

Promoting policy change

ASSAF's advocacy work urges the State of Israel to take responsibility for providing comprehensive rehabilitation programs for victims of torture and human trafficking. So far (Feb. 2014) we achieved major achievements: increased capacity of the government run rehabilitation shelter from 36 to 51 beds, opening a day center for survivors (men and women) who were released to the community, promoting the resettlement of 20 individuals for asylum in European countries, changing the release documents from detention center to a discreet one, excluding their testimonies (as was initially). We are promoting granting work permits to victims of human trafficking, beyond the yearlong rehabilitation.

ASSAF wishes to see the capacity of shelters expand and therapeutic programs expand into the community and not only in shelters. ASSAF rejects any detention of victims of torture and human trafficking because of the re-traumatization that can occur in a detention setting.

ASSAF's Key Programs advancing life in dignity for refugees and asylum seekers in Israel: Social Work Program for PTSD: We provide professional social services support to 50-70 asylum seekers and their families every month; HIV and families at risk Program: Empowering asylum seekers with HIV to navigate complex medical services and procedures through various authorities and CSO's; trained volunteers accompany at-risk families, Providing them with on-going emotional and practical support; Humanitarian Assistance: Providing emergency assistance grants to 15-20 asylum seekers each month; Empowerment of victims of torture: group and individual therapy (provided by a professional social worker) empowering victims of torture to get their life back on track, overcoming their ordeal. -Youth Program for refugees and asylum seekers at risk aged 11–19 Advocacy for policy change – publishing reports, lobbying and raising awareness of policy makers and opinion leaders to the reality of refugees and asylum seekers living with no institutional support.

ASSAF is a registered Israeli non-profit NGO. Our activities are made possible thanks to the generous support of foundations and individuals from Israel and abroad. Money transfers can be made to Israel Discount Bank LTD, Tel Aviv City Branch (14) account no. 70818985 IBAN: IL410110140000070818985 please visit our website for further tax-deductible options: www.assaf.org.il/en

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