



SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC® (HRC) UNITED STATES

Torture remains a deadly reality in today's world. Amnesty International reports that torture continues to exist in over 140 countries. Throughout the world, there are people living in constant fear of abduction, imprisonment, abuse, torture and execution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in certain social groups or political opinion.

“They didn’t break my body, but they broke my soul.”

- HRC Client



Each year, thousands of survivors of torture, domestic violence, human trafficking and other human rights abuses flee persecution in their home countries, seeking **asylum or other forms of immigration relief in the United States**. While still coping with the physical and emotional trauma of abuse and flight, asylum seekers are faced with the immediate challenge of proving their case in order to avoid being sent back to further torture and abuse—or worse. In order to gain legal status, survivors must provide evidence of a credible fear of persecution should they return to their home countries. But the signs of past abuse are often invisible to authorities and attorneys. In many cases, the only evidence of persecution is the scars on survivors' bodies and the damage to their mental health. Such evidence can only be documented by expert physicians and mental health professionals.

Clinical evaluations and expert evidence in asylum proceedings

Founded in 1993, HealthRight International's Human Rights Clinic (HRC) mobilizes the health sector to assist survivors of torture and abuse seeking asylum and other forms of immigration relief in the U.S. HRC trains and deploys volunteer physicians and mental health professionals to provide **pro bono clinical examinations of survivors**, document the scars and signs of abuse, and prepare affidavits for use as expert evidence in immigration proceedings.

Training and support for clinical volunteers

HRC provides physicians and mental health professionals with intensive **training and mentorship** that prepares them to recognize and document the medical and psychological effects of torture and to write effective clinical affidavits. HRC volunteers form a network of hundreds of professionals across 12 sites (AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, MD, ME, NJ, NY, PA, VA, WA) who evaluate survivors of torture and other human rights abuses.

While no amount of care can erase the mental and physical anguish caused by torture, HealthRight International aims to mitigate the consequences of abuse and to protect survivors from further rights violations. Through the combined efforts of HRC staff, immigration attorneys, and volunteer clinicians, survivors of torture and abuse are given the support to build a life free from persecution.

Ongoing support and community connection

In addition to the painful physical and psychological consequences of their abuse, survivors face the financial, medical, social and logistical challenges of settling in a new country. Through the HRC's **Access to Services and Support for Survivors of Torture (ASSIST) program**, HealthRight provides case management and psychosocial support to survivors in need of follow-up services, connecting survivors who receive forensic evaluations to needed medical, mental health and social services in their communities, and providing additional support and advocacy for those who need it.

“[The] Human Rights Clinic is the ultimate form of primary care medicine.

I am convinced I saved more lives through the HRC than through my regular practice.”

- HRC Volunteer Clinician

“As per your help I was able to be granted [asylum] by the Immigration Judge, which changed my whole life. I see things different and I don't know how to express my excitement...I feel like I am born again, without all that weight on my shoulders.”

- HRC Client

Impact of the HRC

Since 1993, **the HRC has helped more than 4,800 individuals from around the world** who were tortured or persecuted gain asylum and other protections. The **grant rate of asylum** or other immigration relief for survivors who obtained expert affidavits from the HRC is approximately **90%**, far above the 50% grant rate for asylum applications nationally.

Since its launch in 2009, the HRC's **Access to Services and Support for Survivors of Torture (ASSIST) program** has provided individual case management to **nearly 800 survivors of torture** living throughout the United States, and connected clients with much-needed free or low-cost services in their communities. These services include medical and mental health care; ESL and GED classes; employment and legal assistance; help with food, clothing, housing and transportation; support and empowerment groups; and assistance accessing public benefits for clients who are eligible. HRC volunteer clinicians who refer survivors to ASSIST play a critical role in ensuring that these individuals have access to the care and resources they need to rebuild their lives in the U.S.

“I just wanted to reach out regarding [the HRC clinician who evaluated my client]. She really deserves a medal of honor... I believe that the doctor's testimony on [our client's] behalf most certainly helped save the client from an adverse ruling.”

- HRC Attorney Partner



HealthRight client celebrates being granted asylum with ASSIST staff.

Partnering with community providers

The HRC model relies on the strong partnerships we have developed with medical, psychological, legal and social service providers and organizations in our sites throughout the country. The HRC serves as a bridge between survivors of torture and other human rights abuses, their legal representatives, HRC volunteer medical and mental health clinicians, and a wide array of community resources to enable survivors to overcome the lasting effects of torture, abuse and the daily challenges of resettlement in the United States. The HRC's ASSIST Program partners with service providers in clients' communities to ensure access to free or low-cost culturally-competent services.

“You made me feel very good, seeing [my therapist], going to the center [for ESL], the most important things, applying for Medicaid. Thank you, thank you, thank you! ...I feel and I see different now...I always will thank you for your help.”

- HRC Client

HealthRight International is a health and human rights organization founded in 1990 by a group of physicians including the late Dr. Jonathan Mann. HealthRight works with local partners to build sustainable access to health care for excluded populations in the U.S. and around the world. For more information, please contact: Lauren Pessa, Program Director, Human Rights Clinic at 212-992-6132 or lauren.pessa@healthright.org.

To make a gift, visit us at: <https://healthright.org/get-involved/donate/> Please specify “Human Rights Clinic”.