



Common Threads Project

An integrative recovery program for the
psychological consequences of
sexual violence

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www.commonthreadsproject.org

from victims to survivors to agents of change

Basic Principles of Recovery

- Survivors deserve the opportunity for *transformative* enduring recovery
- Collective trauma requires collective treatment
- Psychotherapy must be imbedded within comprehensive, holistic, contextualized services
- Neurobiological evidence points to importance of *non-verbal, experiential* approaches with trauma
- We can learn from the wisdom of cultural practices for healing

<https://vimeo.com/84129707>

Story cloth traditions: Chile



Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) South Africa



Hmong textiles



AIDS quilt



Why story cloths for trauma?

- Connection with others
- Emotional safety
- Self-expression
- Self-regulation
- Gradual processing of trauma
- Mastery

Common Threads Project Ecuador pilot 2012



Common Threads Project Nepal 2014-present



Common Threads Project Bosnia 2015-



Common Threads Project Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo 2017-



Capacity Building

- Intensive experiential training for local therapists
- They adapt Common Threads for their context
- Continued mentoring and supervision



Common Threads Intervention

- Not for acute crisis, not for everyone
- Integrative approach:
body/emotions/mind/relationships/spirit
- 6 months (two 3 month phases), then peer directed circle continues
- Addresses somatic and MH symptoms, stigma, isolation, shame, constriction, etc.
- Restore voice and agency-- post traumatic growth

Psycho-education about consequences of trauma



Somatic awareness and processing



Group Cohesion: rebuilding trust



Creating visual narratives in cloth



Insight: experiencing personal narratives in a new way



This is what I cannot say:



This is a moment I will never forget:



This is what the cloth is trying to say:



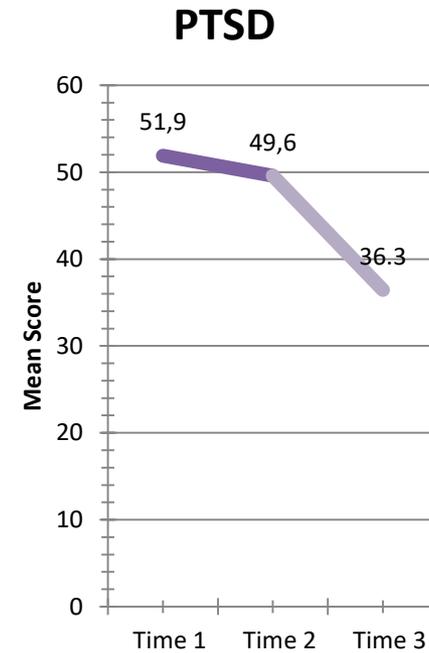
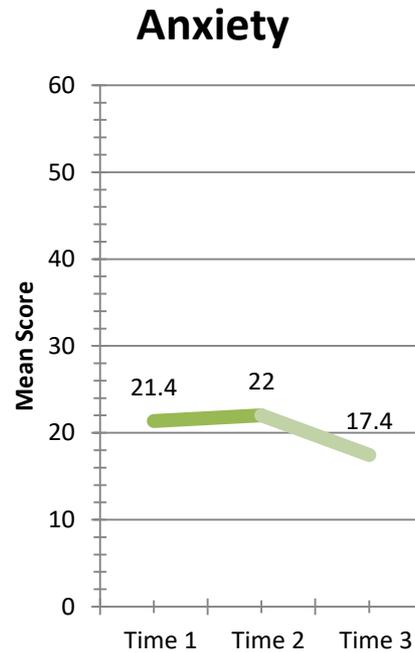
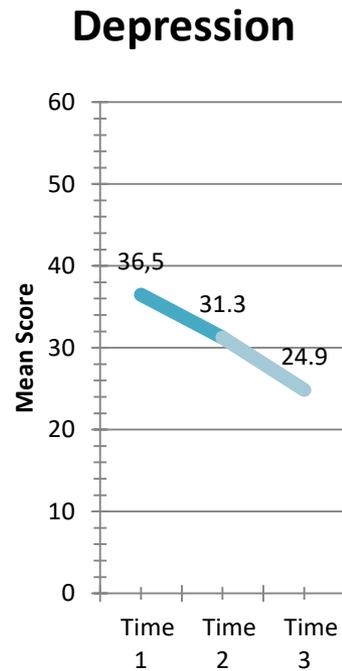
This is what I need you to know:



This is what helped me to survive:

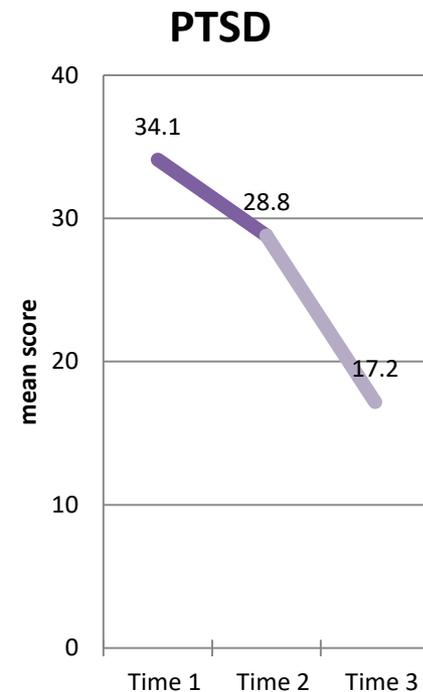
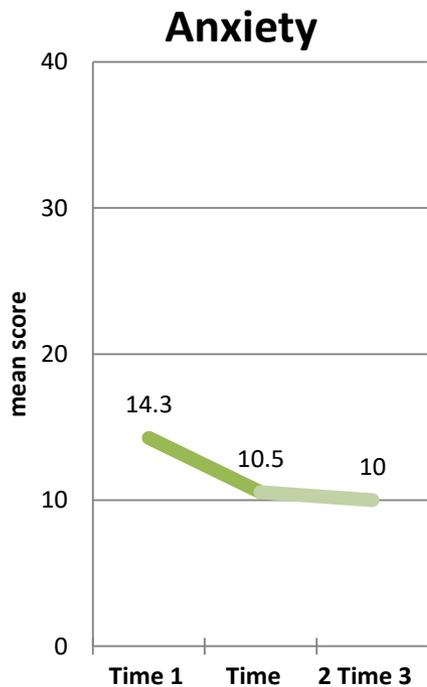
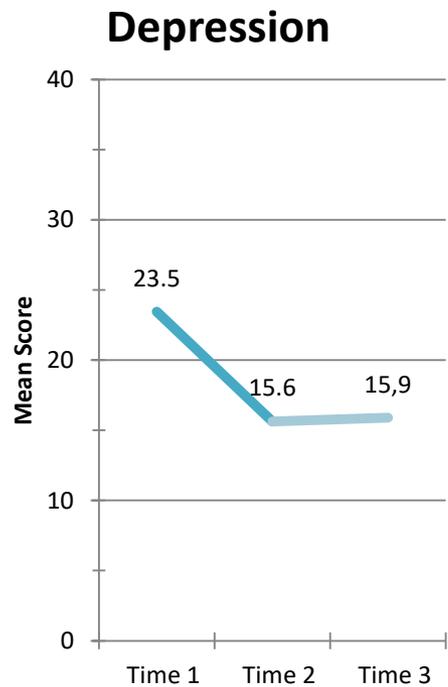


Quantitative outcomes: Nepal



Change in HSCL/PCL scores

Quantitative outcomes: Bosnia



Change in HSCL/PCL scores

Qualitative themes: Ecuador, Bosnia, Nepal, DRC

- **Commonality:** *“It’s only after we came to the program that we knew that it’s not just us who are having such problems. Everyone had it.”*
- **Connection with others** *“We met with the friends; came close to them next week and closer next week. Since then I have understood their feelings and they understood mine.”*
“I felt that I can trust these women. They encouraged me and I told them my story. I was upset but everything went well. At the end I felt relief because I’ve found some peace and support in this group of women. That means a lot for me.”
- **Improved functioning** *“I was feeling terrible, heavy, desperate, disoriented. I didn’t have strength for anything, in my home and at my work. What I used to do was to cry. I feel like a new person. I feel lighter, with more strength to work and to have my own business.”*
- **Improved Mood** *“I feel amazing! I am really happy, I have more energy for everything that I do. Sometimes I am kidding that after each session here I feel like I have wings. This means a lot for me.”*

- **Relief from traumatic memory** *“I used to be disturbed while recalling my past incidents. I always thought about it. But this made us express our stories into one textile and now I don’t feel very disturbed when I express those things. We expressed it in a piece of cloth. That’s it.”*
“I decided to put on the cloth what was inside of me, what is bothering me for years. I did it! I feel relief now, I think that is the purpose of this, it’s good that I finally was able to admit some things to myself and to try to eliminate it from myself...I know that my experience is still inside of me, but I feel better”
- **Self-regulation** *“I used to get angry at the smallest things and would beat my daughters in frustration. Even though I used to feel guilty about it, I could not control myself... my anger’s in check now, I don’t fight with my husband and don’t beat my daughters”*
“Personally this therapy helped me a lot to get out of the habit of being always angry.
- **Acquiring coping skills** *“We learned exercises we could do when we are in tension. That was important.”*

- **Self-expression:** *“It’s here that we share what we keep hidden.”*
“ This was a unique thing that the story that we cannot speak about we could express it in pictures.”
- **Sense of self:** *“I feel relieved when I come here. I feel that this time is for me. I mean I feel like I exist.”*
- **Overcoming shame and self-blame:** *“I heard some stories and I also have painful experience....but I think there is no reason to be ashamed for that. Now I am clear...what happened to me is not my fault. I think that is important to find somebody with whom you can talk. It is easier when somebody understands you. I am glad that I have support in this group. All these women now are like my family!”*
- **Agency:** *“I thought that I can't do anything but now I feel I can do something.”*
“We used to be scared. But now we don’t feel scared, we can speak and are confident of doing something.”
- **Voice:** *“Almost all women reported that they felt a great change in their life after involvement in the Common Threads project Mainly it was found that they gained self-confidence to raise voices against injustice.”*

Sustainability and Empowerment in Nepal: Sajha Dhago 2014-2019

- Some circles continue to meet after 4 years
- Participants teach neighbors skills during the earthquake
- A few have started their own businesses and have become community leaders
- Women in the original circles have been co-leading subsequent circles
- Lead therapists supervise colleagues, and train others
- TPO Nepal as “Sajha Dhago Center Of Excellence” for the region
- Intervention has been integrated into local therapeutic tool box



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