



AFTER THE TSUNAMI

On the 28th December 2004, 2 days after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, I was asked by a Christian NGO to go to South Thailand to support their expatriate staff while they looked for a missing staff member from Switzerland. I knew Carol through the International Christian Fellowship in Phnom Penh, the church we both attend. She was on holiday with her cousin and brother in Khao Lak, the worst Tsunami hit area in Thailand.

When the first wall of water hit the shore, Carol, her brother and her cousin were on the beach. Her brother survived, Carol and her cousin perished. Her cousin's remains were identified 3 weeks later and Carol remains amongst the 2529 confirmed missing.

As I went on this assignment, I had EMDR HAP in mind. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a very effective therapy that brings rapid healing from psychological trauma, and I use this therapeutic approach in my work in Cambodia. The Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP) provides emergency EMDR training to therapists local to disaster sites. Within three weeks of the Tsunami, HAP provided a trauma workshop to 35 Thai mental health personnel and EMDR Level-1 training to 63 Thai MH professionals. The second Level-1 training took place in April and Thailand now 92 EMDR trainees to treat Tsunami survivors. All of this was before the project proposal was written and budget calculated.

God brought two business men into the life of the program who are working towards setting up a foundation called Making Waves; a logistics effort to facilitate the

training of Thai therapists and their healing practice in the affected provinces.

One of the major successes of this program has been to get people back into the water, as explained in the Making Waves presentation and Times Asia article. Most Tsunami survivors rely on the sea for their living in some way – fishing, hotel and resort workers, restaurant owners, etc. They are terrified of the water and there are many false alarms regarding another wave. So far we have managed to take some 200 people back into the water.

Here is a story of Tae, a 13-year-old boy who survived the Tsunami and who now lives in one of the many displaced persons camps. Tae was alone in his wooden home watching TV when the first wall of water struck. He became trapped and the house was swept three kilometres away. Subsequently, Tae had recurring nightmares of being swept away by another Tsunami, thus being retraumatized on a nightly basis. Unknowingly, he would set off a Tsunami alert by shouting "the wave is coming" in his sleep, which in turn terrified everyone around him who would then run away from the camp in search of high ground.

An EMDR trainee worked with him under my supervision and after three sessions his nightmares stopped and his other trauma symptoms subsided. He finally managed to overcome the fear of water and was able to return to the sea, which he used to love more than anything.

This is one of many such stories. What has been important is working with the Thai government and my years of work in Cambodia had prepared me well for such diplomacy. At the same time, EMDR in Cambodia is beginning to be known and plans to teach a 1-year pre-EMDR trauma course are underway.

I will be involved in the work in Thailand for the next year at least, whilst continuing to keep my counselling practice going in Cambodia. Websites to help you understand more about my work in Cambodia are:

www.bridgeclublive.com/makingwaves

www.timeasia.com issue 4 April 2005, trauma article
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501050404/trauma.html>

www.EMDR.com

www.EMDRHAP.com (Thailand) ■

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