

# **HEARTLAND ALLIANCE**

**MARJORIE KOVLER CENTER**

## **Kovler Center Community Council Information Packet**

Last Updated: November 2017

## Community Council Information

The Community Council advances the work of Marjorie Kovler Center – supporting survivors of torture in rebuilding their lives – through community engagement and fundraising.

The Community Council was formed in March 2012 following a winter “friendraising” event at Revolution Brewing in Chicago. The original members responded to an appeal for energetic young professionals passionate about human rights to assist Kovler Center in raising awareness and much-needed funds.

The Council meets monthly and is responsible for assisting with four events: the annual winter Revolution Brewing “Friendraiser”, the spring bi-annual benefit, the annual summer Musicians Against Torture Concert, and an annual fall Cultural Gathering.

Kovler Center is committed to the principle that treatment for survivors of torture is best achieved in a community context. Survivors and their families begin to rebuild their lives at Kovler Center, and the Community Council extends this network of support, strengthening the bond between clients and the Chicago community. The Community Council has developed into a strong team whose members consider one another to be great friends as well as colleagues.

### Structure and Policies

1. Members should be passionate about Marjorie Kovler Center’s mission, interested in fundraising, and willing to represent Kovler Center.
2. Members should make a good faith effort to attend monthly meetings and to contribute time and effort necessary to ensure the success of the quarterly events.
3. One member will serve as Community Council chair for a period of one year (or longer). Four members will serve as Event Chairs. The Chair will oversee the group as a whole and the four Event Chairs. The Chair will schedule meetings and distribute brief minutes following each meeting. The Program Officer of Grants Development will provide support and oversight.
4. Individuals interested in joining the Community Council should contact either the Chair or Development staff at Kovler Center.

## Membership Requirements

- Attend Monthly Meetings
- Attend as many Kovler Center events as possible
- Respond to e-mails from Kovler Center staff and the Community Council Chair within 48 hours

### Members are also encouraged to:

- Invite a friend (or friends!) to join the Council
- Host and plan a small event for the Council and friends
- Support Kovler Center through the following ways:
  - Personal donation(s)
  - Purchasing tickets for Kovler Center events
  - Inviting friends to purchase tickets and give donations
  - Donations from your company/Matching Gifts
  - Donations from a company or foundation that you solicited
  - Auction donations (in-kind gifts)
- Share events and information on your personal social media sites
- Find new and innovative ways to raise awareness and funds for Kovler Center and survivors of torture (for example: doing a race or marathon, creating a Go Fund Me page, a bake sale, the next Ice Bucket Challenge)

## Mission and History of the Marjorie Kovler Center

**Mission:** Heartland Alliance Marjorie Kovler Center (Kovler Center) helps transform the lives of survivors recovering from the complex consequences of torture. Kovler Center provides medical, mental health, and social services; trains and educates locally and globally; and advocates for the end of torture worldwide.

**Overall Goal:** Kovler Center's overall goal is to help torture survivors and their families heal from trauma and attend to their health, build effective support networks, and lead productive and meaningful lives.

**History:** Kovler Center was founded in 1987 to respond to the needs of the burgeoning number of torture survivors arriving in Chicago having fled war and persecution in their home countries. Since its founding, Kovler Center has served a global population of survivors of politically-sanctioned torture who are rebuilding their lives in Chicago.

**Population Served:** Each year, Kovler Center helps improve the lives of 350 – 400 survivors – including nearly 100 newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees who represent approximately 60 countries where torture has upended their lives. All participants receiving services at Kovler Center experienced torture in a country outside of the United States or were related to a torture survivor. Since its founding, Kovler Center has served participants from 84 countries. Participants are from all regions of the world, the majority from sub-Saharan Africa. Participants are equally male and female. Adult participants represent a range of professions in their home countries, but all are actively seeking employment wherever they can. The majority live below the poverty line, and rely on others for support.

**Umbrella Organization:** Heartland Alliance International (HAI) is an international human rights organization that addresses some of the world's most complex human rights challenges by ensuring healing and justice for extremely vulnerable populations. HAI is the global arm of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, a family of organizations that has been leading anti-poverty and social justice work in Chicago for more than 125 years. HAI is comprised of nearly a dozen country offices implementing programs on a broad range of human rights issues globally, as well as the Marjorie Kovler Center.

**Torture Defined:** Torture, the deliberate infliction of severe physical or psychological pain (involving violent physical, psychological and/or sexual acts), is a unique form of interpersonal trauma that violates a person's human rights and constructs psychological barriers to participating in society. Torture disempowers individuals and communities by exerting control, and creates a cycle of fear, intimidation, and alienation. As a result, torture survivors are a most vulnerable population whose needs are not easily served by mainstream healthcare services.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What does Kovler Center do?

Kovler Center provides holistic treatment to survivors of politically-sanctioned torture and their families. More specifically, Kovler Center staff and volunteers offer medical and rehabilitative care, mental health care, and social services.

### How long has the Center been around?

Kovler Center was founded in 1987 and celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

### What specific services are offered?

- **Medical/Rehabilitative Care** – primary care (nurse practitioner), psychiatry, occupational therapy, eye care, dental care, forensic exams, massage therapy, acupuncture
- **Mental Health Care** – individual counseling, psychotherapy, group and family therapy, crisis care, clinical consultation, forensic mental health exams
- **Social Services** – occupational therapy (cooking group, farming, etc.), assistance with gaining and retaining health insurance, connecting individuals with interpreters, providing emergency support (food and CTA passes), making referrals to clinics, legal support, housing, employment, ESL classes etc.

### Is Kovler Center a 501(c)3 organization?

No, Kovler Center is a program of the 501(c)3 Heartland Alliance International (HAI). Kovler Center was adopted by HAI in 2012. Prior to that, we were part of a different organization within the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights family.

### How big is your organization? How many employees?

We have 15 staff and only 5 are full-time. We rely on the help of nearly 200 volunteers, pro bono professionals, and paraprofessionals.

### How many torture survivors do you see? How many are there in the U.S.?

Kovler Center reaches 350-400 survivors each year. At any given time, there are an additional 30-40 individuals on a waitlist ready to receive services. It is estimated that there are more 1.3 million torture survivors living in the U.S. (Center for Victims of Torture, 2015)

### Where are people tortured?

In 2014, Amnesty International reported that torture was documented in 141 countries. Kovler Center sees survivors from nearly 60 countries each year and more than 80 total countries since its founding. A large number of our current participants experienced torture in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### How can I learn more about the field?

Visit [kovlercenter.org](http://kovlercenter.org) to stay up to date on what we do and read publications by our staff. Another great resource is [irct.org](http://irct.org). Relevant books include [Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People](#) by John Conroy, [The Blindfold's Eye: My Journey from Torture to Truth](#) by Sister Dianna Ortiz, and [Trauma and Recovery](#) by Judith Lewis Herman.

## Quotes and Stories of Impact

Celeste arrived at the Kovler Center alone, traumatized, and speaking very little English. In Africa, she had been a university student. After attending a peaceful campus demonstration she was brutally tortured by the police. Following her release, Celeste's family received numerous threats on her life, forcing her to flee her family, her home, and her country.

She found her way to Chicago, and was welcomed into the Kovler Center community where she was offered a safe environment within which to heal. She was treated with dignity and provided with essential medical, mental health, and social services. Since receiving treatment, she has shown improvement in her symptoms related to post-traumatic stress and says she is beginning to feel more hopeful about life.

Inside Kovler Center darkness lifts and lives are transformed. Some of the most egregious acts imaginable, inflicted deliberately to cause physical and psychological pain, come to light. Torture victims are told "No one will believe you..." "No one cares...". At the Kovler Center these messages are slowly deconstructed within the context of a supportive relationship with staff and volunteers who understand the devastating impact of torture. "I didn't want to come here." "I didn't choose this." gradually turn into "I have a life here." "I have a new community."

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When James was a little boy he used to crawl into his father's bed at night to be close to him, he loved him so. As a college student, he worked to promote democracy, also out of love for his father, and, perhaps, to impress him, like any young man might do. But in honoring his father, he paid a high price. Agents of the oppressive regime seized him and placed him in isolation. Detained for several months, on two separate occasions, he was tortured each time, and each time he thought he would die. When he was finally released, he fled his country, leaving behind his pregnant wife and the rest of his family. He found his way to the Kovler Center and to a path of healing. Today, James just wants to live in peace, without the intrusive memories, without the overwhelming feeling of sadness, and without having to flee again.

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"It took me years, but through the kindness and generosity of Kovler Center's dedicated professionals, I came to trust human beings again. Because of Kovler, I believe that people are good. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." - Survivor

"Kovler gave me back my confidence. When I'm here I feel like I'm at home (in my country) because I'm at ease, comfortable. Everyone who works here is very passionate. People here work with their hearts." - Survivor

"Kovler is my only home in the U.S. It gives me a home. It made me realize that everyone has a second chance. It gave me a new life. Kovler gave me back my life." - Survivor

"I'm not sure I could have survived in this country if I hadn't found Kovler. They helped me with everything." - Survivor



*"In that darkness, where so many have stood and continue to stand, transfixed by paralyzing fear, there flickers the faint light of a candle, the Marjorie Kovler Center." – Sisster Dianna Ortiz, [The Blindfold's Eye: My Journey from Torture to Truth](#)*

*"If there are times of darkness, let us be reminded there is always light. I am guided only by my duty to facilitate each client's rediscovery of the inner light that resides within; the light will illuminate a future path and promote psychological healing."  
– Shubhara, Doctoral Student Intern*

*"When I came to Kovler Center I was one of the walking dead. I couldn't put one foot in front of the other. But Kovler Center and my therapist saved my life. I now have a job, my family is here, my children are successful. I never wanted to leave my country but my life is now here."- Survivor*

*"I am a living testimony of the how this noble services Kovler can transform lives and I am indeed grateful." - Survivor*



*Kovler Center and Heartland Alliance International staff showing their support for ending torture*

## Community Council Members



*Molly, Amanda, and Brian at the 2017 Musicians Against Torture Benefit Concert*

**Brian Meyers – Council Chair**

**Kristen Keller**

**Amanda Kim**

**Marie Shebeck**

**Molly Siegel**

## Key Staff

**Mary Lynn Everson – Senior Director** – Mary Lynn is responsible overall for the growth and continued development of Marjorie Kovler Center as well as for contributing to the growth of international programming. Mary Lynn has a Master of Science degree in Counseling Psychology from George Williams College and over 30 years of experience in community mental health, including 20 years developing and managing trauma treatment programs at Heartland Alliance.

**Rachel Baird – Program Officer, Grants Development** – Rachel joined Kovler Center in October 2016 and writes grant proposals and reports. She has a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Baylor University and moved to Chicago from Houston where she was born and raised. Rachel is the staff liaison for the Community Council, supporting meetings and events.

**Sally Bianca Berkhia – Associate Director of Development** – Sally joined the External Relations team for Heartland Alliance International (HAI) in summer 2017 and supports both HAI and Kovler Center’s fundraising efforts. She oversees the Leadership Council, events, donor cultivation, and more.

**Judith Weinstein – Leadership Council** - Judith led the Community Council since its founding in 2012 and was the Associate Director of Development at Kovler Center until the summer of 2017. Judith plans on volunteering for Kovler Center and perhaps acting as the liaison between the Community Council and the Leadership Council, where she now serves.

**We hope you will consider joining the Community Council and make a difference for survivors of torture!**

*For more information, please contact Rachel Baird at 224.479.2722 or [rbaird@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:rbaird@heartlandalliance.org). Also, like us on facebook ([facebook.com/kovlercenter/](https://facebook.com/kovlercenter/)) for information on events and other Kovler Center updates!*