



# Partners for Women's Equality

*Providing leadership development, organizational support and a nourishing network of colleagues to equip women worldwide in their journey toward fairness and equality.*

• April 2011 •

## Trauma Healing in Haiti

*by Efu Nyaki, Founder and Director of Afya Women's Holistic Center in Brazil.*

*In January 2011, I went to Haiti with two colleagues, Dennis Moorman and Father Roman St. Vil to contribute in a healing of trauma for the Haitian people who have gone through so many traumatic events in the past few years, including the earthquake of January 12, 2010 which killed over 200,000 people. On the one-year anniversary the Haitian people remembered the devastating earthquake and those lost. On this day of such painful memories, we were present in Haiti working on Trauma Healing. We purposely chose the time in January because we knew it would be a time of many traumatic memories and thus offer the opportunity for the beginning of the healing process.*

*Arriving in Haiti, we were struck by the overwhelming situation around the city of Port-au-Prince where more than a million-and-a-half people are still living in tents and in a very precarious situation. The lack of infrastructure and the destruction of the city were evident in the many ruined buildings as well as the crowd of tents all over the city. Those images show that so much healing is still needed for these people who are living through such trauma.*

## Somatic Experiencing – Healing Trauma

Dr. Peter Levine, the founder of the method of Somatic Experiencing says, "Trauma is perhaps the most...misunderstood and untreated cause of human suffering." He says, "We enter "survival mode" when we perceive that our lives are being threatened. If we are overwhelmed by the threat and are unable to successfully defend ourselves, we can become stuck in survival mode. This highly aroused state is designed solely to enable short-term defensive actions, but left untreated over time, it begins to form the symptom of trauma. These symptoms can invade every aspect of our lives, and are powerful enough to distort the very fabric of our individual, cultural, economic, political, religious, and spiritual aspirations." *Taken from Peter Levine's Study Guide-Trauma Healing*

Since two of us in the team are trained in Somatic Experiencing, a neuro-physiological method of healing trauma developed by Dr. Peter Levine from Boulder, Colorado, we were able to put our experience to good use. This method of healing trauma is a body-awareness approach to re-negotiating trauma. It is based on the observation of animals in the wild. Dr. Levine noticed that wild animals have "an inborn immunity to trauma."

## Fundraising Notes

Our November 2010 Benefit raised about \$8400 which went to fund our general operations, allowing us to coordinate our volunteers and handle all of our programs. Thanks to everyone who participated and volunteered to make this night a success!



*Rose Tuiyott Lewis and Maureen White Eagle*



*Enjoying the gala*

Even though they are constantly living in life-threatening situations, animals do not carry trauma in their bodies in the same way that humans do. When a wild animal escapes from a potentially life-threatening situation, they first run to seek out a safe place to hide and then take all of the time their body needs to shake and allow their nervous system to reset.

### **Our Bodies Hold onto Trauma**

We human beings also respond to threat instinctively, but because of our well-developed neo-cortex, the rational part of our brain, and our modern culture of not taking the time we need to heal from such situations, we have a tendency to cut off the completion of our body's natural response to trauma. Consequently, our body oftentimes ends up carrying the residue of this trauma for many years. Dr. Levine found that human beings can be taught to allow this natural re-setting of their nervous system to occur and thus to successfully renegotiate trauma and release it from our body.

In our training, we also learned that when trauma is not healed, its vortex gets stronger each time the person goes through other traumatizing events. This stronger vortex attracts more traumatic events creating a self-perpetuating cycle of trauma. With this awareness, our hope is to continue helping our sisters and brothers in Haiti to break the vicious cycle of traumatic events that have been happening in Haiti for many years.

The precarious situation in Haiti reminded me of Dr. Levine's words in every aspect. It was obvious for me that many Haitian people are urgently in need of this kind of healing. Our approach was to start this work with community leaders who have a willingness to work on beginning the process of healing their own trauma, as well as volunteer to help others in their community to also heal their trauma.

### **Community Leaders Learn to Heal Trauma**

We worked with two groups of community leaders, each group containing 30 community leaders. We spent five days with each group training them in the basic skills for re-negotiating and healing trauma. They learned and understood basic concepts—what trauma is, what causes it, and what are the common symptoms. We taught them basic skills for re-negotiating trauma: being in touch with one's body and its sensations, breathing adequately, and reminding themselves of the availability of the healing resources within and around them while giving time to the body to engage in its innate healing capacity.

Common symptoms of trauma these leaders related from their own reality were: breathlessness, heart arrhythmia, shaking/trembling, pains, dizziness, loss of balance, paralysis, lack of sleep, depression, isolation, extreme fears, aggressiveness, violent emotional explosions, digestion problems, loss of appetite and difficulty in concentration. Many of them had experienced some of these trauma symptoms and were thus able to witness the transformation and healing happening during the five-days training.

In their final evaluation, those who participated in the trauma seminars gave their testimonies indicating the profound transformations they noticed in their bodies. For example, one young man said he had not been able to sleep since his wife died and left him to care for their six-month-old daughter alone. After the second day of training, he said that he was able to sleep for the first time since that tragedy. We heard many other similar testimonies of healing among the group. They all promised to take this healing to others who are in need of such help.

## **Annual Fund Update**

This year, PWE has launched our first ever annual fund campaign.

Formalizing our fundraising this way gives us an opportunity to improve development planning, monitor donations and keep our donors in the loop of our organization's financial well-being.

Join us on a Journey toward fairness and equality for women:

[PWE Annual Fund](#)

Help PWE develop our four programs promoting partnership with indigenous women worldwide to achieve equity and equality:

[2011 Program Development](#)

---

**Follow us on Twitter:** [@pwetweets](#)

**Join us on Facebook:**  
[Partners for Women's Equality](#)

---

## **2012 Brazil Wisdom Exchange**

**February 9-16, 2012**



A joint program with the Afya Holistic Center in João Pessoa, Brazil

Join us at any of these information sessions to learn more about our upcoming Holistic Healing Wisdom Exchange in Brazil:

**April 12th 6:30 - 7:30 pm**  
Dunn Brothers  
4648 East Lake Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55406

## Somatic Healing is simple and effective

The group was generally struck by the simplicity of the method for helping others as well as its profound impact on their own healing. They requested that we provide other seminars in the future to help them continue in the process of healing trauma. Several even mentioned that this method of healing trauma should be taught all over Haiti. As a means of follow up, the participants from both groups formed study groups, which plan to meet once or twice each month by region. These groups will serve as peer supervision groups where they can practice this method of healing trauma as well as talk with one another about their experiences of working with others. For our part, we committed to return to Haiti in the future to follow up with supervision of these groups as well as training other groups throughout Haiti.

*Eupharasi Nyaki, or Efu, is a healer and teacher who will be the key instructor for the Wisdom Exchange in Brazil on February 9-16, 2012. She holds diplomas in Education, Theology, and multiple certificates in healing modalities & counseling.*

*Both Efu and Dennis are trained in Somatic Experiencing for the Healing of Trauma. For more information on healing trauma through Somatic Experiencing, you can visit their website at: [www.TraumaHealing.com](http://www.TraumaHealing.com)*

---

## PWE is looking for volunteers:

**Do you have experience writing curriculum?** We need volunteers with experience in working with middle school age girls to write a curriculum for our Kenya Girls Friends program. We also need a new leader for our Kenya work group.

**Do you like to edit video?** We need someone with experience in editing video to put together one or more short videos of our Kenyan program.

**Enjoy event planning?** We also need some volunteers to work on our annual benefit (which may be in Oct this year)

If interested, please email me at:  
[maureen@partnersforwomensequality.org](mailto:maureen@partnersforwomensequality.org)

---

## Leadership Circle

Are you interested in helping to change women's lives for the better?

Get involved by joining our Leadership Circle and help empower women throughout the world to gain the skills and education needed to overcome the cultural obstacles, discrimination, violence, and poverty they face just for being female.

We're currently accepting applications for our Leadership Circle for people with experience on a "hands-on" nonprofit board, with skills in in the areas of finance, accounting, fundraising, marketing & communications, management, or international experience particularly in the countries we're working in-- Guatemala, Brazil, Kenya.

[Board Member Application](#)

**April 27th 5-6 pm**

**May 4th 5-6 pm**

St. Catherine University

601 25th Ave. S.

Minneapolis, MN 55454

For more information:

[Holistic Healing- Brazil Wisdom Exchange](#)

---

## Kenya Girl Friends Update



St. Francis Xavier Secondary School for Girls

### PWE'S First Sponsorship Graduates

Purity Marek is a Maasai girl forced to leave school along with her younger sister because her family was unable to pay their school fees.

In Kenya in most cases, families have multiple children and it's considered more important to send their sons to school. If a parent cannot afford to send their son to school they are likely to "sell" their daughter into marriage to afford their son's tuition.

In 2007, nearly sixty-six million girls did not have access to education in communities around the world. In Kenya, this problem is acute. Girls in Kenya can be forced into marriage at ages as young as ten, often as a second or third wife to a much older man.

The main means of livelihood for the Maasai people is owning livestock-- agriculture isn't feasible due to the extreme drought conditions. Purity's family was too poor to own livestock. Without revenue from livestock there's no money to pay the education fees for girls.

Without the fees for school, many of these Maasai girls will be sold into marriage. The PWE Girl Friend program has the ability to respond to this urgent need and raise the education fees for these Maasai girls so that they can receive an education.

PWE pays approximately \$750 per year for the support of each girl we sponsor. This helps cover the cost of tuition, books and personal items. The parents of the Maasai girls we are supporting do not

---

have this much money, so our support is crucial for the girls' continued education.

Purity graduated from St. Francis Girls' Secondary School in December 2010, and is working on a ranch near her village. We're excited for her and proud of her accomplishment.

**How You Can Help:** [PWE's Friendship Campaign](#)

PWE is seeking monetary donations to help support Kenyan girls. Contributions go directly to paying the educational expenses of girls in Kenya.

---

### **A Big Thank You**

Thank you to Hands on Minnesota for donating the space for our Board meetings.

---

### **PWE Board Member Honored**

Congratulations to Board Member Sarah Deer who was honored recently by the U.S. Department of Justice. She received a Crime Victims' Rights Week Award. Only 8 individuals were chosen from nominations from across the country.

U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. recognized Sarah for her outstanding service to crime victims at the National Crime Victims' Rights Awards Recognition Ceremony on April 8, 2011 in Washington, D.C.

---

**Partners for Women's Equality**  
**3868 Heather Drive**  
**Eagan, MN 55122**

**E-mail:** [www.partnersforwomensequality.org](http://www.partnersforwomensequality.org)