

**Protestant University of Rwanda**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**Memory Work in Rwanda**

***Churches and civil-society organisations  
twenty-five years after the genocide against the Tutsi***

*Proceedings of the colloquium held in Huye (Rwanda)*

*on 17-19 March 2019*

Edited by Tharcisse Gatwa and Philippe Denis



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# **Student Trauma First Aid Training Project at PIASS**

Anne Dietrich  
(Centre for Research and Action towards  
Sustainable Peace and Development)

CRASPD, the Centre for Research and Action towards Sustainable Peace and Development, was founded by the Faculty of Development Studies (FDS) of the Protestant Institute for Arts and Social Science (PIASS), soon to be known as Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR), in 2015 to connect “high quality education in response to the educational needs of communities” with sharing expertise and involving students, faculty and staff in outreach programmes (Community Service)”. CRASPD is offering advisory and training services for civil society and local government actors to improve local communities’ wellbeing and to support their peaceful co-existence. We provide tailor-made consultancy, facilitation and training, as well as research services based on request, in different areas ([www.craspd.com](http://www.craspd.com)).

Today, the CRASPD team consists of the Centre’s Coordinator and Head of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dr Kazuyuki Sasaki, the Centre’s Assistant Coordinator, Serge Muvunyi, Peace Programme Officer Floriane Niyungeko (both PIASS graduates) and Anne Dietrich, International Peace Advisor based at PIASS by GIZ Civil Peace Service. Our working language is English, but we speak Japanese, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, French and German, too. Our team also works with the lecturers of the Faculty of Development Studies who join us in planning and carrying out consultancy work, research projects in support of the local communities.

## **The PIASS Peace Club**

The PIASS Peace Club was founded in 2013 by students of the department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS). These students were determined not only to learn

about conflict and peace, but also to put their knowledge into practical action even during the period of their studies and came up with different activities to undertake. The Department of Peace & Conflict Studies supported the effort, and Dr. Kazuyuki, the Head of the Department, made funds available from his Japanese Mission Support Fund to financially back up the activities.

Currently, the PIASS Peace Club has now more than 70 active members and more than 600 'virtual' members on Facebook and WhatsApp. Members of PIASS Peace Club are young people from Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania, Japan and other countries, studying at different faculties of PIASS. They created their own website: <https://piasspeaceclub.wordpress.com> and a Facebook page.



*PIASS Peace Club General Assembly 2017*

### **A Request from the Peace Club**

In late 2016, members of the Committee of PIASS Peace Club approached CRASPD to ask whether they could get support to organise a training for students to develop skills to help people who experience emotional crises during the yearly PIASS Commemoration event. They explained that many of them would have liked to support people who were in emotional turmoil, having their cruel memories coming back to them during this event, but they had no idea what they could have possibly done without making it worse. They said they would like to learn at least basic skills to overcome their fear in these situations and be able to help people when this happens to them.

## **The PIASS Commemoration Event**

During the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the theological institution providing theological education to future ministers was known as the Protestant Faculty of Theology of Butare (FTPB), which had replaced in 1990 the School of Theology of Butare (ETB), founded in 1970. Since 2010, it is known as Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) and, more recently, Protestant University of Rwanda (PUR).

PIASS holds a commemoration event every year to remember the victims of the genocide including Dr Faustin Rwagacuzi, his wife and his four children. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Theology (FTPB) at the time. Remembrance is also held for the lecturers and students who have been killed on the campus.



*Walk to Remember at PIASS Commemoration 2018*

PIASS started to organise commemoration events in 2011 when PUR management and students who were members of the Association des Élèves et Étudiants Rescapés du Génocide (AERG) initiated this important event. The idea of having a particular commemoration event for PIASS came from these students and they shared it with the management of PIASS who were supportive. Since that time, the institution has been organising a commemoration event every year.

The PIASS Commemoration starts on a Saturday night with a fire, which is traditionally interpreted as a symbol of life, and two minutes of silence, in memory of PIASS staff and student victims. Prayers, speeches and lectures by PIASS scholars and guest speakers follow. The

commemoration continues on Sunday with a remembrance walk by the staff, students, local government officials, survivors, representatives of victims' families and friends in memory of the agony through which the Tutsi traveled during the genocide. The walk ends at the PUR memorial site where participants lay commemorative flowers. This is followed by a church service, further speeches and lectures.



*Laying Flowers at the Memorial during PIASS Commemoration 2018*

The commemoration itself, according to the author's experience, can be quite frightening, especially in the evening where it starts in the dark and, except the fire, there is little light to illuminate the place. Not much information is provided on what will be happening next. For people who have lost loved ones at PUR in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, this commemoration is a very vital event in their yearly calendar. They attend it every time, even though they know that they might suffer from emotional breakdowns while they are participating in the commemoration.

### **Students' Initiative: Trauma First Aid Training**

The students in the Committee of the PIASS Peace Club (PPC) were determined to try and gain skills to support these people and others when they were experiencing re-traumatisation at these events. Peace Club had neither funding to conduct a training, nor did they know an expert who could have trained them how they could recognise trauma/ emotional crisis, stabilise it and support people experiencing this inner turmoil.

CRASPD appreciated this initiative of the Peace Club and, together with the PPC Committee, designed an implementation strategy. Dr Kazuyuki, the coordinator of the Center and the head of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, requested from the Japanese Mission Support Group, which funded his service, that it finance the training. To find a skilled team to train students in what we now called “Trauma First Aid”, CRASPD and the Peace Club asked Dr. Josephine Mukabera, a clinical psychologist and lecturer at PIASS at the time (and Head of the Department of Rural and Community Development) and Thérèse Uwitonze, the Director of Mental Health Dignity Foundation (MHDF), a local NGO in Huye, to conduct the training. Both women are not only trained and practicing in clinical psychology and counseling, but also bring experience in training others in dealing with trauma, and they happily agreed to support this commendable initiative of the PPC students.

The PUR Peace Club, in collaboration with CRASPD held the first Student Trauma First Aid Training for 4 days ahead of the 2017 Commemoration period. In a preparatory meeting, the PPC president, the CRASPD staff, and the two trainers reflected on the purpose of the training, time frame, methods to use, facilitation and materials as well as logistic arrangements. Regarding mobilisation, it was decided that only students in their first or second semester would be invited, so that they could serve at the PIASS Commemoration in at least two subsequent years before graduating and leaving the institution. 6 students, 10 male, and 6 female, from PIASS Peace Club, PIASS Student Union, Association des Étudiants Réscapés du Génocide (Genocide Survivors’ Student Organisation) and members of other student clubs participated.

In the training, concepts of mental health and trauma and its different possible causes were introduced, as well as the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) syndrome, its different symptoms, aspects and mutilations.

Three types of PTSD were presented:

- Primary PTSD, resulting from direct experience or witnessing of a traumatic event.
- Secondary or vicarious PTSD, resulting from working with trauma sufferers, e.g. as aid providers or trauma counsellors.

- Transgenerational PTSD, resulting from the effects of traumatic events being passed to the next generation, e.g. in the families.

To learn about the third type of PTSD was vital for the student participants to understand that even people of their own generation can be affected and may need support. Providing and explaining a tested tool for self-evaluation, the trainers gave the participants an opportunity to explore for themselves if and how much they had been affected by traumatic events in their own lives and supported them to deal with those issues and related emotional challenges.



*Introducing concepts of mental health*

Given that knowledge is not enough to help persons who are suffering from the effects of traumatic events, attitudes and qualities for counselling and helping trauma sufferers, like being patient, compassionate, self-aware, respectful, and encouraging the person suffering from trauma that there is hope to heal, were presented and practiced in exercises and role plays later in the training.



*Practicing Active Listening as a technique to calm and re-connect*

A variety of approaches and techniques that can help to stabilise people who are experiencing an emotional crisis were introduced and practiced. Active Listening, the Peace Circle, Pal Dan Gum and different other approaches and relaxation techniques were introduced as powerful techniques to help “PTSD cases” and practiced among participants. Lots of practical tips were also given, like how to approach a person in emotional crisis with respect and caution, having water and tissues available etc. Different types of care for people suffering from the effects of traumatic events/ PTSD cases were explained. It was pointed out that student Trauma First Aiders would just be doing an ‘intervention in emergency cases’. Individual or group therapy as well as medication should be provided by mental health professionals only. The future Trauma First Aiders learned that they need to know about other types of care so that they can transfer PTSD sufferers to the professionals who might help them in the medium and longer term after a First Aid intervention. Another important insight was that, even as Trauma First Aiders, they can contribute to prevent stigmatization of the persons showing symptoms of traumatic suffering by their community by raising awareness and explaining the problem and need of support to the people surrounding the sufferer.

The major goals of an emergency intervention in situations of emotional crisis were presented:

- Relief of symptoms

- Restoration of the optimal level of functioning that existed before the present crisis
- Understanding of the relevant precipitating events that contributed to the state of disequilibrium. Identification of remedial measures that can be taken by the client or family that are available through community resources.

Different techniques were introduced and practiced with participants that help to focus and to refurbish connections between our physical status and the cognitive and emotional spheres of our mind that tend to be disrupted when we are suffering from trauma. Most of these techniques were taken from the CAPACITAR approach ([www.capacitair.org](http://www.capacitair.org)).



*Learning how to connect different areas of the brain to overcome traumatic emotions*

Immediately before the PIASS Genocide Commemoration, the group of “Mental Health Advisors” (as they now decided to call themselves to avoid being mistaken as accident first aiders) gathered for a follow up day with the trainers. The follow up day was dedicated to reviewing and practicing some of the techniques learned, to role-play situations of trauma first aid intervention and to prepare teams who would be responsible for specific tasks during the Commemoration event.

During the 2017 PIASS Genocide Commemoration, the group of “Mental Health Advisors”, under the supervision of the two trainers, managed to support participants of the event who were triggered into emotional crises by what happened in the event.

Ahead of the 2018 commemoration period, the PIASS Peace Club in collaboration with CRASPD and with support from the Civil Peace Service of GIZ CPS (Civil Peace Service at German Development Cooperation), organised a training of a second group of Trauma First Aiders, a refresher training adding additional skills for the 2017 group, and a joint follow-up and team building day.

In the 2018 and 2019 PIASS Commemoration events, mixed teams from the batches trained in both years, served, again, under the supervision of the two trainers. In 2017 and 2018, the PIASS Peace Club, in cooperation with CRASPD and one of the Trauma First Aid Trainers, supported different Secondary Schools during their commemoration events.

### **Students' experience of the Trauma First Aid Training and its impact**

In the 'refresher training' of 2018, participants shared their experiences in helping others in different commemoration events and situations:

In this training I learned that before helping other people we have to start with ourselves. ... At last year's commemoration at PUR I appreciated how I helped people who were experiencing emotional crisis, but before attending the Training First Aid, I could not even approach people in emotional crisis. I was afraid of causing more harm by doing something wrong.

After attending this training, I have been able to help anyone who has an emotional crisis during the commemoration, in terms of emergency intervention... These skills have been very helpful in my community. After the commemoration, the leaders of the sector and the cell [Rwarenga, Remera Sector, Eastern Province] came to me asking whether I had these skills for long time, [and] I told them they are related to my studies, and they highly appreciated the work I did.

One of my friends lost his sister and mother on the same day. This heavy loss disturbed his mental health ... He had even started thinking of committing suicide... I went to his room and found him alone crying. I approached him and touched his shoulders as a sign of compassion and empathy. This ... pushed him to tell me more about how he was feeling. Later, I summoned other friends, and together we organised ... memorial services to pray and remember his relatives ... and invited him ... to share food with us. These initiatives strengthened him and helped him feel accompanied (CRASPD, Report of Trauma First Aid Refresher Training 2018).

## **Student mental health advisors at Umucyo Nyanza commemoration event**

In 2018, a group of the Mental Health Advisors, together with MHDF staff, agreed with the Assistant Coordinator of CRASPD to support the commemoration event of the Umucyo Nyanza Women's group who are organising their own commemoration every year. This group is consisting of women survivors from the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and women whose husbands are imprisoned under Genocide crime charges, and for four years now, have been working together for reconciliation and development. Their cooperation started in 2014 when Reconciliation Evangelism and Christian Healing (REACH), a Rwandan NGO, provided a series of trainings for a much larger group of women in Nyanza on trauma healing and reconciliation. After these trainings, around twenty of the women decided to start working together on dealing with their challenges of psychosocial consequences of the Genocide and supporting each other to improve their socio-economic situation. Since 2014, the PIASS Faculty of Development, through CRASPD, has been supporting different activities, like trauma healing, conflict management and reconciliation, project planning, management trainings, as well as income generating activities like growing and selling flowers, producing hand crafted items and tailoring. The project is working as the model project which is being supported by the PIASS Faculty of Development Studies and provides a field of practice for students in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and other departments and faculties. Many of the activities involving students are done in cooperation with the PUR Peace Club which regularly organises working study trips to Nyanza where the students help the women in their field work, e.g. to carry heavy bags of manure to their flower field, or to learn about new handcraft techniques or marketing channels for their products.

In May 2018, CRASPD in collaboration with the students' PUR Peace Club organised their participation in the Genocide commemoration day with the women in Nyanza to pay tribute to the victims of 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, especially to family members, friends and neighbours of some of the women of Umucyo Nyanza. This event was a good time for students and women to share experiences and learn how reconciliation

is taking place at grassroots level. Many members of PIASS Peace Club participated and appreciated that this activity broadened their knowledge and thoughts about the Genocide against Tutsi in 1994 and how the people in Rwanda are coping with its consequences. Participants were from different countries such as South Sudan, DR Congo, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Japan and Germany.

Since its earlier years, the PUR Peace Club members had observed that great emotional pain had been experienced by the women who were mourning the loss of their relatives in the Genocide. Now that they had been trained, a group of the Mental Health Advisors and one of the trainers joined the women's Commemoration event in Nyanza; together, they provided a framework for emotional support and a safe space for the women during the commemoration event and supported those who showed signs of emotional distress. Everyone found the Commemoration a much more dignified and calm event thanks to this psychosocial support. The PIASS Peace Club Media Team produced a short video documentary about the event, with statements by some of the Umucyo Nyanza women and some of the participating students.

More can be found at:

<https://piasspeaceclub.wordpress.com/women-in-nyanza> or

<https://web.facebook.com/darcy.mwuhiro/videos>

[pcb.2178781069021853/1554141074697407/?type=3&theater](https://web.facebook.com/darcy.mwuhiro/videos/pcb.2178781069021853/1554141074697407/?type=3&theater).



*Students at Commemoration at Nyanza Memorial in 2018*

In April 2019, the PUR Peace Club, in cooperation with CRASPD, organised a second refresher training for those students and graduates trained in the two years before who are still in Huye, ahead of the PUR Commemoration. We decided not to conduct a full training cycle this year, as we trusted that the number of trained Mental Health Advisors we have on campus right now would be sufficient to provide trauma first aid support during the 2019 PUR Commemoration. In 2020, we are envisaging to start a new cycle as many of the trained students will have graduated and left PUR and the area by then.



*Student Mental Health Advisors at PUR 2019 Commemoration event*

## **Lessons Learned**

### **a) *Students' commitment can serve community needs***

When the students of PUR Peace Club first approached CRASPD with the request for support to conduct a Trauma First Aid training, the Center's staff were doubtful whether such an undertaking would make sense, but also if they could provide the support that the students had been asking for. After some exploration of possibilities, especially regarding potential trainers and funding needed, they decided to try and positively respond. Dr Josephine Mukabera, a long time lecturer known for her skills in trauma counselling, partnered with Thèrèse Uwitonze, the director of

Mental Health Dignity Foundation (MHDF), a civil society organisation offering trauma healing therapy and training. The latter had served as an assistant lecturer in the PUR Department of Peace & Conflict Studies earlier and her facilitation skills were appreciated. Although the two ladies had not worked together before, both agreed to enter a lengthy and diligent preparation process where outside conditions, resources, timing, mobilisation and methodologies were discussed with the CRASPD team and roles and responsibilities carefully assigned.

***b) Introduction to basic concepts is needed***

It turned out that the decision to precede the Trauma First Aid Training with an introduction to the main terminologies, ideas and approaches of nonviolent conflict transformation was a valuable one, because many of the participants were either students of Peace & Conflict Studies in their first year or students of other Faculties and had not yet been exposed to them. As the understanding of ‘conflict’ and ‘violence’ and their differences and dimensions, as well as their relevance for violence induced trauma were very relevant to the Trauma First Aid Training, we believe that this introduction was very necessary.

***c) Support for young committed people can overcome fear to help where needed***

The commitment of the students to actively participate in the Trauma First Aid Training, especially in learning and applying relaxation and grounding techniques and practicing the skills to accompany a person in an emotional crisis during role plays with each other was outstanding. The litmus test for their confidence in the acquired skills and courage to act came with the follow-up day where they volunteered to assume different support roles as “Mental Health Advisors” during the PUR 2017 Commemoration. They formed teams, according to different capacities, experiences, language and physical skills and prepared themselves mentally and spiritually, in conducting peace circles to fulfill these roles. They agreed to serve in different teams at specific places and times and to organise handovers so that the successors would know the status of people accompanied and receive other useful information from the team that served before them.

Supervised by the trainers, they then showed great courage, humility and care when applying their skills in the event itself. Light yellow vests were produced with large letters “Mental Health Advisor” printed on them, so that they could be recognised immediately and easily found in the crowd of visitors of the commemoration event. The PUR management officially endorsed the services of the Trauma First Aid Team Contacts. Agreements were made with the Rwandan Red Cross who would be present with an ambulance for emergency cases, and the students were familiarised with the processes of referring someone to professional care if needed. They organised two rooms close to the site of the commemoration where they arranged mattresses, pillows, candles and facilities to prepare tea, so that they could take persons in mental distress to this safe place to rest, relax and calm down, especially during the phase of the commemoration happening at night time.

### **Outlook: Exploring the nexus between mental health and peacebuilding after large-scale violence**

Meanwhile, CRASPD is exploring how far peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts are having impacts on the psychic wellbeing of people affected by large-scale violence. In communication about this topic with the GIZ Civil Peace Service in 2017, we were directed to an interesting case study on Sierra Leone that appeared in *Science* magazine.

In their article “Reconciling after Civil Conflict Increases Social Capital but Decreases Individual Well-Being” that appeared in the *Science Magazine* in May 2016, Jacobus Cilliers, Oeindrila Dube and Bilal Siddiqi report about a study of the impact of one post-war reconciliation strategy that was implemented in 100 communities in Sierra Leone.<sup>1</sup> The major insight of this study is that peace and reconciliation activities after large scale violence, conducted without being accompanied and/or preceded by efforts to support those affected by traumatic events from these situations, can lead to worsening their psychic suffering.

Given that all interventions that are dealing with violent experiences run a great risk to re-traumatise those who were involved, CRASPD was determined to find approaches and practices to mitigate those risks.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cilliers, O. Dube, B. Siddiqi, “Reconciling after civil conflict increases social capital but decreases well-being”, *Science*, vol. 352, issue 6287 (13 May 2016), 787-794.

Adding, unintentionally, to the psychic suffering of those who have experienced atrocities and shocks through human violence not only are detrimental to their wellbeing, but can also lead to mutually reinforcing cycles of violence.

In her article “Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience Programme: Experiential Education towards Resilience and Trauma Informed People and Practice” where she describes the STAR training programme of the Eastern Mennonite University,<sup>2</sup> Kathrin Mansfield refers to the notion captured in the work of Rohr that “pain that is not transformed is transferred”, leading to further violence against self and others, in one form or the other. In this sense, the results of the Sierra Leone study, mentioned above, demands peacebuilders’ urgent attention. As we try to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation after violent conflict, we may act with the best intentions, but inadvertently contribute to more violence and suffering.

Consequently, CRASPD, with its mandate being to contribute to sustainable peace and development, has been exploring ways how we can avoid doing harm to those suffering from the aftermath of large scale violence and to the improvement of relationships between people in the affected communities. Our hope is to find approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation that do not only prevent harmful impacts on participants mental wellbeing; we also believe that when people who have been affected by violence induced trauma experience psychic and spiritual healing, peacebuilding and reconciliation measures are much more effective and sustainable.

Some of the approaches we found so far that combine psychosocial healing with peacebuilding and reconciliation measures are:

- a) Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation Approach (Prof. Masahiro Minami, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, BC, Canada) based on action-based therapeutic principles of Japanese Morita therapy and principles of contact theory.

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<sup>2</sup> K. Mansfield, “Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience programme: Experiential education towards resilience and trauma informed people and practice”, *Intervention*, 2017, 15 (2017), 264-277.

- b) Empower Program, developed by Compelled By Love (Australia) that focuses on the alleviation of trauma symptoms and forgiveness and carried out in Rwanda in cooperation with the local NGO.
- c) Community-Based Socioterapy is a group therapy for people who experience violence induced trauma. It has been developed in clinical settings in Europe and adapted to the Rwandan context.
- d) Restorative circles, also known as restorative dialogue, are a community system and process to deal with violent conflict that is based on Nonviolent Communication (after Marshall Rosenberg<sup>3</sup>). It was developed by Dominic Barter in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro do Brazil.
- e) Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) Program is a programme of experience based learning that has been developed to integrate knowledge about trauma and recovery into a workshop format that fosters participants' self confidence, ability to communicate constructively in conflict to productively contribute to the community across divisions and to constructively resolve conflict. It was created by facilitators of the Alternatives to Violence Program in Rwanda and Burundi after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.
- f) STAR Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resilience (Eastern Mennonite University) combines learning about trauma healing and peacebuilding with experience based methods to develop skills to deal with its aftermath. It has been developed by the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding after the 9/11 attacks in the US and is now offered to international participants.

For September/October 2019, CRASPD is planning to organise a conference with representatives of some of those, and possibly other, approaches which integrate psychosocial support into peacebuilding and reconciliation programs. This is done in order to highlight mental health care/healing as a condition for sustainable peace, building sustainable links between actors from various organisations and institutions in the area who continue working on best practices to integrate measures of care for the mental wellbeing of target populations into peacebuilding activities.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication. A language of life*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

Preceding this conference, CRASPD will organise a training of the “Restorative Dialogue/ Restorative Circles” approach with one of the main trainers of this approach for staff and volunteers of different partner organisations in the region that combines conflict management with mental healing and is, so far, not known in the region.

### **Resource websites**

Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation Approach (Prof. Masahiro Minami, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, BC, Canada – <https://www.sfu.ca/education/faculty-profiles/mminami/conferences/invited.html>).

Capacitair International – <https://www.capacitar.org>.

Center for Research and Action towards Sustainable Peace and Development (CRASPD) – <https://PIASSwww.craspd.com>.

Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance (CARSA) – <https://www.carsaministry.org/>.

Community-Based Sociotherapy (CBS) Program Rwanda – <http://www.sociotherapy.org>.

Empower Program, by Compelled by Love (Australia) – <https://www.compelledbylove.org.au>.

Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) Program, Musanze, Rwanda – <https://healingandrebuidingourcommunities.org/about-hroc>.

Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences, (PIASS) / Protestant University of Rwanda) – [www.piass.ac.rw](http://www.piass.ac.rw).

Restorative Circles/ Restorative Dialogue Program – <https://www.restorativecircles.org>.

STAR Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resilience at the Eastern Mennonite University – <https://emu.edu/cjp/star>.