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Dear Friends of Common Threads Project,

It has been a year of development and maturity for Common Threads Project. In 2018, we set out to take stock and strengthen our organizational platform before moving into the next stage of expansion. After a youthful and passionate first chapter in which we launched a flurry of projects on four continents, this year we stepped back for reflection, consolidation, and planning. In turning our focus inward we enrich our output for the future.

Kamba Moja, our project in DRC, completed its first three circles during 2018 with resounding enthusiasm from staff and participants alike. I traveled to South Kivu to meet with the facilitators and the women in the Panzi Foundation circles to learn about their experience of the program. They showed me their story cloths, and asked me to listen to their stories. They expressed enormous gratitude for the program that has fostered their recovery. I was deeply moved by their bravery, their solidarity, and their capacity for joy. Resilience is a breathtaking phenomenon to witness. Because of their excitement, the positive results of the program evaluation at Panzi, and the encouragement of our partner Dr. Denis Mukwege, an expansion of the DRC project will begin in early 2019.

This year, our Bosnia team completed data collection and studied the findings from our BiH project. (See p. 7 for more information on Bosnia.) Despite the many challenges with our BiH partners, we found successful outcomes for the participants on nearly all the variables measured. We saw clear evidence from both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews of the transformative impact of Common Threads Project on participants.

We held our first ever faculty and board retreat in June 2018. Our US board and faculty had a chance to get to know one another, and by engaging in experiential aspects of Common Threads Project together, such as making story cloths, the board deepened its understanding of key aspects of our program. Faculty shared expertise from trauma therapies and art therapy and explored many challenges and lessons learned from our projects.

Rachel Cohen, PhD, is a clinical psychologist who has been in practice for over 30 years. She founded Common Threads Project in 2012.
In 2018, we narrowed the distance across the Atlantic for our organization: The US and Geneva executive boards are engaging in more unified and coordinated work towards common goals of governance, fundraising, and communications. The boards crafted and signed a joint venture agreement in July, and will be convening joint e-meetings at several points during the year.

We made substantial progress in communications and outreach. In April, we celebrated the release of a promotional video produced by our dedicated Geneva board, which was screened at a public event at the Grüti theater in Geneva. We also improved our visibility by renovating our website and expanding our social media presence.

Common Threads Project has begun an informal affiliation with Parsons School of Design and Psychology Department at The New School, in New York. We are delighted to be working with creative graduate students in the brand new Textile MFA program at Parsons, who are volunteering by curating story cloths, researching textile traditions and supporting our communications. Holding a Parsons exhibition of Common Threads story cloths in NY is under consideration for 2019.

We are also grateful for recent involvement from Clinical Psychology professor Adam Brown and graduate students in his research lab at The New School. We look forward to seeing this collaboration grow in the year ahead, as this skilled team helps with Common Threads Project efficacy research.

Unfortunately, our plan to launch healing circles in the US has been thwarted by the massive budget cuts of the Trump administration for all services to refugees. While the government cut refugee admissions by an astounding 75%, budgets to assist refugees were similarly slashed. This has meant that many long-standing community agencies have had to close their doors, and staff cutbacks have been severe at those agencies still operating.

For Common Threads Project, this has meant that the program we had long anticipated and prepared for in Phoenix had to be cancelled at the last minute, just before our training was to begin. Similarly, we faced the indefinite postponement of the program that was due to begin in 2018 in New York, with the preeminent Program for Survivors of Torture (PSOT) at Bellevue Hospital. PSOT’s intrepid leadership intends to make this program come to fruition in 2019.

Our mission to respond to the psychosocial needs of survivors of sexual violence, trauma, war and displacement becomes ever more urgent. You have responded to our call with heartfelt support and financial contributions, and we have done our best to stretch these dollars for maximum impact. Our research now demonstrates transformative therapeutic improvement-- often for women who thought they had no future at all. You have restored their hope and ours as well. We count on you as we continue this important journey together.

With gratitude and all best wishes for 2019,

Rachel Cohen, PhD
Founder and Executive Director
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Common Threads Project DRC, known as Kamba Moja (Swahili for “the thread that unites us”), began in late 2017 and concluded in October 2018. During Phase I of the Common Threads Project process, our participants built a circle of trust and solidarity, designed and sewed their story cloths, shared their experiences, practiced empathic listening, and learned stress reduction skills. With the help of their skilled facilitators they were able to reduce shame, stigma, self-blame and unresolved grief.

During Phase II of the Kamba Moja circles, participants planned and created group story cloths while focusing on resilience. The women created story cloths using themes such as “this is what helped me to survive,” “this is what I will not tolerate,” or “this is how I deserve to be treated.” They also practiced exercises that increase empathy, group cohesion, and mind-body awareness. Women had the opportunity to experience their stories in a new way and move toward trauma recovery.

A small program evaluation was conducted by ICART, the evaluation department of Panzi Foundation. The results of the evaluation showed improvements across the board for participants, including decreased mental health symptoms, improved functioning, and increased self-esteem, self confidence, social cohesion, and sense of belonging. A continuation of the Kamba Moja program with a systematic research study was recommended.
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Our Bosnia and Herzegovina project was completed in 2018, with our women’s circles in Tuzla and Bihac concluding in June. The following months were dedicated toward the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation study assessed the effectiveness the program in comparison to a control group who did not participate in the intervention. Our findings from Bosnia will be shared with others in the field in a publication in the coming year.

“My life is less or more the same, but I feel different. I feel better. Nothing is so difficult for me, I don’t worry so much about what was before, I am not under pressure for no reason, I am more positive and energetic and I am sure that it is because of these activities here.”

The data analyzed shows that Common Threads Project had a significant positive impact on nearly all variables measured, including reduction of symptoms like depression, PTSD, and anxiety, as well as subjective sense of wellbeing, sense of group cohesion, belonging, and coping capacities. The group which saw the best fidelity to the Common Threads Project model had overwhelmingly successful outcomes.

“I am trying to overcome my past. I was not like this before. I was thinking a lot about it, but never did anything to help myself. I didn’t know how. Now I know, and I know that I don’t have to keep my problems to myself.”
Improvements in participants are most apparent after Phase II, affirming the importance of a long-term intervention for substantial change. Interviews further demonstrate that participants gained confidence, found a sense of belonging, overcame stigma, shame, and self-blame, and found the intervention to be personally empowering.

“Believe me, even my health problems are better. This helped me to be in a better mood, I have more energy now. People who are around me know that I have changed. I am not under stress like before, and everything is easier.... I have learned how to help myself, how to feel better, and that I will not forget.”
Nepal

Common Threads Project Nepal, known as Sajha Dhago in Nepali, continued to flourish in 2018. Having achieved independence, our partner organization, TPO Nepal, launched a new program for survivors of the 2015 earthquakes in May of 2018. Jamuna Shrestha supervised facilitators Sita Lama and Maiya Koju as they began the first healing circle in Bhaktapur. This represents an exciting development in the life of Common Threads Project, as the program is adapted to fit the needs of different populations.

In August of 2018, TPO Nepal held an exhibition of story cloths made by women in the Bhaktapur circles. The exhibition was supported by UNICEF in collaboration with a psychosocial support center run by the local women’s cooperative. Fifteen story cloths, created over the course of a Common Threads Project circle, were presented in the exhibition. The event was attended by local government officials as well as women of the Suryabinayak municipality.

TPO Nepal plans to continue its expansion of the Common Threads Project program in 2019. The organization has just launched additional Sajha Dhago circles for survivors of human trafficking.

Facilitators Shredevi Khatri and Apsara Giree taking part in an experiential training.
Spreading Our Message

The past year saw our Common Threads Project team making presentations on our work to professional, academic and scientific audiences.

In February, two of our Nepal facilitators, Jamuna Shrestha and Indira Pradhan, reported on the success of Common Threads Project at the International Mental Health Conference in Nepal.

Common Threads Project faculty member Catherine Butterly organized an international conference, “Trauma and What it Means to be Human”, which was held at Webster University in Geneva, Switzerland. Together with Catherine, Rachel Cohen and Cynthia Uccello conducted a workshop on Common Threads Project.

Nepal Facilitators Jamuna Shrestha and Indira Pradhan

Catherine Butterly & Cynthia Uccello presented on Common Threads Project’s work at the World Congress of Psychotherapy conference in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Executive Director Rachel Cohen presented Common Threads Project to the Parsons School of Design as part of New York Textile Month in September. She also presented Common Threads Project to an international symposium of textile educators. Senior Common Threads Project faculty member Lisa Garlock also gave a Textile Month guest lecture in the Parsons textile MFA program to share her work on story cloths and her new on-line archive of story cloth collections (storyclothdatabase.org).

Cynthia Uccello and Catherine Butterly presented on Common Threads Project at the 2018 Symposium on Creativity from an Embodied and Situated View at Utrecht University.

Short Film Premiere

A short promotional film on Common Threads Project was released in April of 2018. The film explores Common Threads’ work with Columbian refugees in Ecuador, survivors in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Pakistani refugees in Nepal and survivors in the DRC. A viewing of the film was hosted on April 26th, at Les Cinémas du Grütli, in Geneva, Switzerland. An audience of representatives from embassies, multilateral organizations, foundations and private supporters were in attendance. The film was followed by a Q&A session with Executive Director Dr. Rachel Cohen.

To view the film, click here.
Partner Awarded Nobel Peace Prize

On Dec 10, 2018, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Dr. Denis Mukwege, a courageous Congolese gynecologist, and Nadia Murad, a Yazidi survivor-activist, for their contributions in the struggle against rape as a weapon of war. Dr. Mukwege is the founder of the Panzi Foundation, our partner in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with such an inspiring leader in supporting survivors and working to end brutality against women.

Dr. Denis Mukwege with Dr. Rachel Cohen
Year In Review

February

Facilitators Jamuna Shrestha and Indira Pradhan reported on Common Threads Project at the International Mental Health Conference in Nepal

April

Common Threads Project faculty Catherine Butterly organized trauma conference in Geneva, Switzerland

June

Common Threads Project held a faculty retreat in upstate New York

Common Threads Project faculty present at the World Congress of Psychotherapy conference

January

Sia Kessi joined the Common Threads Project Geneva Board of Directors

DRC circles began phase II

March

Common Threads Project hosted a viewing of our short film in Geneva, Switzerland

May

Paul March joined the Common Threads Project Geneva Board of Directors

Our Nepali partners began Common Threads Project circles for earthquake survivors
Year In Review

**August**

Panzi Foundation’s research team completed collection of data in DRC

Common Threads Project partner TPO Nepal held an exhibition of story cloths

**October**

Common Threads Project faculty presented at the 2018 Symposium on Creativity from an Embodied and Situated View at Utrecht University

**December**

Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Common Threads Project partner Dr. Denis Mukwege

- Dr. Cohen visited our DRC site and met with partner organization Panzi Foundation

- Common Threads Project Bosnia circles were completed

- Dr. Cohen and faculty member Lisa Garlock participated in New York Textile Month

- Common Threads Project raised over $40,000 in an online fundraiser
Kamba Moja, DRC

Thanks to a grant secured by the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation from the Ville de Geneve, we will be expanding the DRC Kamba Moja project to provide services to several special groups, requiring new adaptations of the program and specialized training of staff. Four circles will serve adolescent survivors, many of whom are in residential recovery at Maison Dorcas. Two circles will be held in nearby Kavumu, where at least 46 little girls were abducted and brutally raped by militia. (In 2017, a landmark legal case brought the perpetrators, including several elected officials, to justice.) Kamba Moja will be offered to mothers of those victims in addition to other adult survivors. Several years later, the mothers continue to suffer from the psychological impact of the trauma and Panzi will provide an opportunity for recovery with Kamba Moja. We are honored to continue our work with this extraordinary organization.
Common Threads Project is exploring several potential projects for 2019.

**Lebanon**

Over the past year, we have built partnerships with several community based organizations in Lebanon, with the goal of launching a project to serve Syrian refugee women in Beirut and the surrounding area. We are seeking grants to support this, and hope to launch with our partners in Lebanon within the year.

**Iraq**

Common Threads Project is exploring the possibility of expanding our collaboration with the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation to other project sites. Among the possibilities is a collaboration in Iraq, in which we would partner with Dr. Mukwege’s staff to offer holistic care to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

**IOM, Boko Haram & Rohingya**

We have begun to engage a consultancy with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a major agency within the UN system. They have proposed projects with Common Threads Project in Nigeria with survivors of Boko Haram abductions, and for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, when funds can be secured to conduct this urgent work.

**USA**

Meanwhile, we plan to launch our first Common Threads Project circles in the US in 2019. Once our partner regains its footing in the face of severe cuts, we will begin a healing circle with the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture in New York City. The circle will be facilitated by Executive Director Rachel Cohen, and Nisha Sajnani, expressive arts therapist and professor at NYU.
Financial Report

Story cloth created by Common Threads Project faculty and staff during the 2018 retreat
Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, revenue for Common Threads Project remained fairly steady between 2017 and 2018. A great deal of our income this year came from personal donations, which increased from $45,455 in 2017 to $59,998 in 2018. This represents a 31.5% increase in donations. Coupled with a grant from the Oak Foundation, the total gross revenue came to over $159,000, which supported our newest project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as research and organizational support and growth. Because no new project was launched in 2018, we did not receive any project grants.
This past year has been dedicated toward organizational improvements at Common Threads Project. We expanded our staff with a full-time administrator, and dedicated funds toward project and staff development. Administrative costs (52.8%) totaled $48,575.94, while program and staff development costs (9.9%) came to $9,132.17 for the year. These investments will allow us to expand our reach in 2019 by providing adequate administration and staff to support new projects. Project costs (37.3%) totaled $34,354.76, which supported women’s circles in DRC and the completion of our work in Bosnia.

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<td>Administrative</td>
<td>$48,575.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>$34,354.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and Program Development</td>
<td>$9,132.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$92,062.87</td>
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Common Threads Project continues to rely on the generosity of professionals who donate a great deal of time and effort through pro bono work. In 2018, the value of services donated to this organization was $143,815, totaling 57.2% of our total resources. The growth and success Common Threads has seen in the past year would not have been possible without the staff members, contractors, and volunteers who were willing to donate part or all of their pay. The goal of Common Threads is to continue to grow our revenue, which will allow for a greater number of paid positions within the organization.

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<td>Grants</td>
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<td>Donations</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$250,773</strong></td>
<td><strong>$263,238</strong></td>
<td><strong>$251,614</strong></td>
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**Resources**

- **Donated Services**: $143,815 (57.2%)
- **Grants**: $48,000 (19.1%)
- **Donations**: $59,799 (23.8%)
Thank you

Common Threads Project is entirely funded through private donations and grants. We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for supporting Common Threads Project in 2018.

Alex Aleinikoff
Samuel Aleinikoff
Shoshana Aleinikoff and Nathan Kittle
Tammy and Aharon Amit
Jeremy Barber
Jessica Bauman
Ann Blume
Barbara Cohen
Edna Cohen Trust
Ann Collier
Ann Dobrejcer
Connie Fogler and Matthew Stevenson
Patricia Friedman and Blair Levin
Marga Fripp
Steven and Jessie Galson
Theresa Gillis
Ann Gordon
Andrew Hamilton
David Hansen
Lynn Hiestand
Alison Hoy
Leslie Jaffe
Linda Kanefield

Bandana Karki
Lori Kenepp
Laura Kittle
Joseph Kohane and Amy Shevrin
Judith Kornblatt
Beth Krug
Greg Lazarus
Lucy Lichtig
Brian Matheron
Bonnie Miller
Nancy Raphael
Anne Ream
Jonathan Roberts
Herbert Salomon and Marcia Lieberson
Griffen Samples
David Scobey and Denise Thal
Jane Shapiro
Karen and Nils Tcheyan
Elizabeth Trospan
Claudia Uccello
James Walker
Helen Weld

Common Threads Project is grateful for grants from the following organizations:

The Statue Foundation

Fondation Pro Victimis Genève

OAK Foundation