

III

What Difference is STAR Making?

FOR THREE STORIES ON HOW STAR MADE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLES' RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE, SEE THE ARTICLES LISTED BELOW.



Virginia Foley's husband, a U.S. diplomat, was assassinated outside of their home in Jordan in 2002. Virginia chose to advocate for a restorative justice approach. Even though this was not possible, there were other STAR strategies that helped her move forward in positive ways. Read her story at: <http://www.emu.edu/peacebuilder/summer07/foley.html>



Paul Nantulya served as the main liaison between Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Sudan program and EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding for the "Leaders in Peacebuilding" program in Eastern Equatoria, a region wracked by more than 50 years of war. Read more about his story at: <http://www.emu.edu/peacebuilder/winter08/sudan>



Two of David Works' four daughters were gunned down in front of him at a church in Colorado. Also shot, he woke up in an intensive care hospital room and "saw" the cycles of violence he had learned at STAR. Immediately, he knew that he wanted to choose a different path. Read more about his story at:

<http://emu.edu/now/news/2009/09/colorado-man-chooses-forgiveness/>

WHAT DIFFERENCE IS STAR MAKING?

Is STAR making a significant difference? Four studies of this relatively young program have been carried out that address the “difference” question. While none of these studies represent the “gold standard” of double-blind controlled research, they do give indications of effects.

The most systematic study was for a PhD dissertation in 2008.¹ The objective was to assess the impact of the five STAR components (trauma healing, peacebuilding, restorative justice, spirituality, security) on two immediate outcomes (change in participant knowledge and attitudes) and two longer-term outcomes (decreased psychological distress in participants and increase in use of STAR-related skills).

Data were collected from two sets of questionnaires. The first set was given to all 42 participants before and after each of the four seminars of 2007, with all 42 responding. The second set was emailed to 293 STAR participants who took seminars from 2002 to 2006 (58 responded) to determine how the insights and skills learned were used one to five years afterwards.

¹ Matthew Stephen Yoder, *Evaluation of an Ecological Intervention Targeting Helpers in the Aftermath of Disasters*, (PhD dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2008)

The researcher found that STAR participants experienced statistically significant increases in knowledge and attitudes related to trauma healing, justice and spirituality, along with significant decreases in psychological distress. Participants expressed the view that they would use STAR-related skills upon returning to their home communities. The follow-up surveys lent support to this view. They found significant increases in use of STAR-related skills up to five years post-STAR. Pre-STAR assessment of psychological distress found that many STAR participants came to the training with moderate to high levels of self-reported symptoms of depression and anxiety. When the same indicators were assessed at the end of the STAR week, statistically significant reductions in distress were reported. Reductions in indicators such as burnout and compassion fatigue were notable but not statistically significant. An important limitation of the study design was the absence of a control group (people who did not take the STAR seminar), which would have allowed changes to be attributed more directly to STAR.

A second study was an analysis of STAR seminar evaluations completed by STAR participants between 2002 and 2006.² Unlike the above study, questionnaires for this evaluation were given only at the end of each seminar. Rating data from six questions, generally on a 1-7 scale, were collected from 549 participants, along with 17 open-ended questions to which 451 participants responded.

In general, the evaluations were very positive. For example, the rating data showed that participants were highly satisfied with their “overall STAR experience.” Ninety-five percent of the participants rated the training 6 or 7 on a 1-to-7 scale and 97 percent stated that the training would have substantial impact on their future trauma work. Comments from the open-ended questions supported their highly positive ratings. For example, most participants stated they would be able to use what they learned when they returned home and gave numerous examples of where and how they would do this. Interaction with other participants of diverse backgrounds

² Ann McBroom, *Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience [STAR], An analysis of evaluations returned by STAR participants, 2002-2006*, report submitted to STAR, Eastern Mennonite University, December 2006



but who shared a common experience was valued. Most participants felt they had gained new knowledge and new ways of helping themselves and others. The analysis also found that STAR was viewed as having increased participants' motivation, commitment and confidence and their belief that positive change is possible. Previous biases and prejudices were acknowledged; they expressed strong support for the distinctive view that listening to the enemy is important. Participants generally left with a better appreciation of the need to take care of themselves and with very specific plans on how they would do that. Some obstacles were identified, such as lack of resources or time in their home settings.

A third study was a formative evaluation done by students in a research and evaluation class of the master's degree program in conflict transformation at EMU during the spring of 2004.³ Forty-two participants were randomly selected from a sample of 105 who had participated in a STAR seminar between February 2002 and January 2004. The questionnaire had 10 questions that were a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. While this study did not have a comparison group, it did have the advantage of assessing the knowledge, attitude and practices of participants up to two years after they had the STAR training.

The responses were overwhelmingly positive with respect to the seminar content and methods, its personally transformative potential, its applicability to participants' work and their desire to stay connected to the program. More specifically, participants experienced changes in both their personal (100 percent) and professional (93 percent) lives. Many described the seminar as a life-changing experience. Ninety-three percent implemented different aspects of their STAR training when they returned home; 43 percent reported creating new training programs or integrating STAR materials into their existing trainings. Others started support groups, wrote articles, produced radio spots, incorporated materials into their sermons or started dialogue groups. Participants stated that, were another traumatic experience to occur, they would have new tools to help address it. There was a high level of

³ Amy Potter and Vernon Jantzi, *STAR Formative Evaluation Report*, report submitted by the Institute for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, April 2004.

support for the seminar (9.5 on a 10 point scale) and how the trauma model relates to peacebuilding and justice. Appreciation was also expressed for how the seminars normalized their personal experiences and created a safe and nurturing space for learning, interacting, renewal and healing. Suggested changes included things like having a longer seminar (or covering less material), further contextualization of the content and methods, and greater diversity of faith traditions and points of view.

The fourth evaluation done was of the Youth STAR training in Sierra Leone, Palestine, Croatia and Kenya.⁴ A total of 169 participants completed the 26-item questionnaire that was given to participants before and immediately after completion of the seven workshops. The facilitators also completed a detailed questionnaire. The author of this study emphasized the need for exercising caution in interpreting the results due to reliability and validity issues.

The results strongly suggested that the workshops were effective in achieving their goals. Both participants and facilitators judged that the workshops instilled knowledge, skills, optimism, and a commitment for participants to become positive agents for change. The participants clearly benefited from the training components dealing with communication skills, peacebuilding and justice, and they gained tools that allowed them to better deal with past and future traumas.

In summary, and within the context of the research limitations noted, the studies found that positive changes occurred among STAR participants, with new knowledge, attitudes and skills generated and that these were maintained years after participating in the training. Additional studies will be valuable, using more rigorous designs and methodologies, especially studies that focus on the longer term impact of STAR and specific changes at the community level.

⁴ Ann McBroom, *An evaluation of Youth STAR training, based on pilot workshops in Sierra Leone, Palestine, Croatia and Kenya*, report submitted to STAR, Eastern Mennonite University, May 2007.



Healthy Individuals and Societies



Trauma Healing Journey: Breaking Cycles of Violence

*This does not apply in all cases; for example, it does not apply to child sexual abuse.

Adaptation of model by Olga Botcharova
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