

9/11 legacy: healing scars of terrorism

BY NOREEN O'DONNELL • JOURNAL NEWS COLUMNIST • AUGUST 29, 2009

Peter C. Alderman would have been 33 this September had he not been attending a breakfast conference at the World Trade Center the morning of the terrorist attacks. Today, when his mother, Elizabeth, sees his friends, she is torn.

Many are married now, with children of their own, and she admits, "It's painful to see them going on with their lives."

But she and her husband, Stephen, are delighted that they are still in touch, still willing to help with the foundation established in Peter Alderman's memory.

"They're the future of the foundation," she said.

This year, to mark the attacks, an arm of the foundation called "Friends of Peter Alderman" will hold a fund-raising walk in Mount Kisco on Sept. 12. More than 40 people - his friends and their families - have already registered.

"We are delighted," said Dr. Stephen Alderman. "We've known many of them since they were kids, young kids. We want some of them to feed our board."

The route will take them from the Mount Kisco Metro-North Railroad station to the Lexington Square Cafe. It is a family-friendly event that local merchants are sponsoring. It includes a buffet lunch.

The money raised will go toward the work that the Aldermans have embraced since their son's death: "healing the psychological scars of terrorism."

Here's how the Aldermans explain what they do.

The problem: "One billion people, a sixth of the world's population, have directly experienced torture, terrorism or mass violence through civil war, ethnic cleansing or genocide. The victims are often left with lifelong mental disabilities preventing them from working, caring for their families, and leading productive lives."

The solution: "To create a sustainable, culturally effective mental health care system. Through expert professional training of indigenous caregivers, 80 percent of the victims of global terrorism and mass violence are returned to productive lives."

The foundation is tackling the problem in two ways. Here's an update.

First it establishes clinics in countries torn by strife, in partnership with ministries of health, universities, religious institutions and local nonprofit organizations. The first opened in 2005 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and there are now clinics operating in Cambodia, Uganda, Rwanda and Haiti. Last month, the Aldermans attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its third Ugandan clinic, in Kitgum, near the Sudanese border, an area devastated by the insurgency of the Lord's Resistance Army and its practice of kidnapping children to serve as soldiers.

"Friends of Peter Alderman" helped to finance the work in Cambodia and raised the money needed for a new clinic roof. It is hoping to raise \$100,000 with the walk.

The second prong of the foundation's work is training mental health professionals.

A master class is held each year in Italy for doctors and psychologists from post-conflict countries. In five years, 39 men and women from 13 countries - from Afghanistan to Iraq, Macedonia and Peru - have participated. They have gone on to work with 400 additional mental health care workers.

The Eastern Africa Trauma Training Workshop is part of an effort to confront the problems of 240 million people affected by war in East Africa. The conference brings together professionals from Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and Sudan, plus Liberia.

Last month, 216 people attended the conference, held in Uganda. What was different this year, Steve Alderman said, was that the young people ran the proceedings, from submitting original papers to setting the tone of the discussions. Fifty medical students were invited as well; the students themselves had been traumatized.

"They now want to start a student conference across Africa, with other medical students all across the continent dealing with trauma," Elizabeth Alderman said. "This is really big time because we're now getting people involved at the student level."

While at the Kitgum clinic, the Aldermans were introduced to a former child soldier, a 17-year-old named James, who had been kidnapped, spent a number of years in the bush and finally escaped.

"He is able to communicate his story best through art," Elizabeth Alderman said.

The pictures are gruesome: Heads stuck on poles, himself being beaten. He was forced to kill. He was forced to burn villages.

In a recorded interview, he said he was finding hope and help through the Peter C. Alderman Foundation.

"He looks initially like any child soldier you would ever see, with eyes cast down," Elizabeth Alderman said. "He won't look at you in the eye. And at the end of this video, this has the most incredible smile as he's telling about his pictures, and how the clinic helped him and there is hope for the future."

When the Aldermans were first hearing James' story, Elizabeth Alderman became upset and left the tent they were in. Her husband thought she was thinking of her son.

"It's not about Pete," she told him.

"What this child had to go through, no child should go through," she said this week.

IF YOU GO

The walkathon on Sept. 12 will begin at 11 a.m. at the Mount Kisco Metro-North Railroad Station at 16 E. Main St. Walkers will head to the Lexington Square Cafe at 510 Lexington Ave. about 1[0xff] miles away.

A buffet lunch will be available at the restaurant.

For more information about participating or sponsoring a walker:

<http://walk.petercalderman.org/fopawalk/about.asp>