

# Lending a hand to Rwanda

Thought Field Therapy taught to cope with genocide

By Nate Hansen  
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Suzanne Connolly and Dottie Webster sit beside one another looking over photos.

Between the idle chit-chat of friends they converse on a professional level about a subject they know well.

Connolly and Webster are colleagues in Thought Field Therapy — a therapeutic process derived from Applied Kinesiology and Acupuncture.

The intention, like most therapies in general, is to act as a treatment for an illness or disability.

This treatment develops in a sequence of acupuncture points which alleviate stress, pain or stigma.

The acupuncture points are taught to people so they may use them during moments of emotional discomfort.

The theory behind it is that relief substitutes the stress and eventually the disturbing thoughts subside.

"It breaks the thought pattern," Webster says. "It breaks the circuit."

In October, the two women joined a Trauma Relief Team out their affiliation with the Association for Thought Field Therapy.

Their first mission was to visit New Orleans and help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Connolly and Webster taught TFT to traumatized residents suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It was also with-

in the remnants of this thriving city they met Dr. Paul Oas, a minister and psychologist.

Oas mentioned an outreach program that assisted people in Africa — it was a program for those who suffered through the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

"Two days after we got home Dr. Oas called and asked if we'd go to Rwanda," Connolly says.

Connolly and Webster were honored for the invitation. They looked forward to helping people who witnessed some of the worst atrocities since the Holocaust.

They arrived in April — the anniversary of a genocide where an estimated 800,000 to 1 million Tutsis and Hutus were massacred.

After 30 hours traveling Connolly and Webster arrived to an orphanage where 400 children resided.

The orphanage was called El Shaddai — it is only one in an estimated 400 orphanages in Rwanda.

If anything was going to tell them how the next three weeks of their trip was going to be, it was the moment they entered a



Courtesy photo

**SUZANNE CONNOLLY** is surrounded by Rwandan children who learned Thought Field Therapy during the Sedona resident's visit to Africa. Connolly traveled with friend and colleague, Dottie Webster, to work with survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that cost an estimated 800,000 to 1 million lives.

building to singing and dancing children — it was a two-hour welcome ceremony.

The team of therapists examined logical means of working with victims. They needed to find the best way to help people who, just over a decade ago, watched as family members

were killed or were assaulted themselves and left to die.

The emotional trauma was extensive and severe.

They taught TFT to the adults and children, then they focused their efforts on instructing 33 community

leaders so they could pass the skills on.

"They were able to experience their grief and allow it to leave them," Connolly says.

Before long, the entire village became self-sufficient in dealing with a grieving process few people can imagine.

Connolly and Webster say the effects were amazing.

Many of the children they worked with had lived most of their lives scavenging for food and living in the wild. Some slept in bushes while others wandered the streets and slept in culverts.

They worked with a 16-year-old boy diagnosed with PTSD.

He experienced shyness, embarrassment and shame from what he witnessed as a child — not to mention how he survived.

After using TFT for only 10 minutes he built up the confidence to look everyone in the eye — more confident.

The village and orphanage in which they lived and taught for three weeks serves two meals a day — beans, corn and a cup of water.

The children only receive a bucket of water for a shower and they do not have toilet paper.

They cannot afford school uniforms, so they learn within the walls of their orphanage.

These are small things compared to what they have lived through, but because of Connolly, Webster and the Association for Thought Field Therapy — they will move on.

Before they left Rwanda, having taught the skills that would provide well-deserved relief, many things happened.

Children learned bits and pieces of English, saying, "Hi" and "How are you," everywhere they went — happier.

Villagers asked them not to leave — appreciative.

A ceremony, like one in which they were welcomed, was performed, but tears replaced dance steps.

According to Sedona's goodwill ambassadors, children waited for 20 to 30 minutes.

"It was heartbreaking," they say in unison.

They were worried the sorrow the children expressed may trigger continued depressive states.

Then, to add proof that their therapy and instruction was working, a Rwandan teacher stepped forward.

"One of the teachers looked at the grieving and crying as a good thing," Webster says.

## El Shaddai orphanage in Rwanda

The orphans of El Shaddai are currently learning skills to place them in the work force. They are learning quilting and would like to have samples of quilt patterns shipped to them to improve their skills.

For more information on how to assist the orphanage with quilt samples contact Carol Bateman at the Sedona Community Center at 282-2834.

"They were learning to deal with emotions."

Connolly and Webster left having accomplished what they set out to do — they passed on a therapy to people in need.

At present time, a research study of Thought Field Therapy is being conducted in El Shaddai and Connolly and Webster's plans are to return next April to check on the results.

The hopes are that things become better with each passing day and that the world never have to witness events like the one in April of 1994 ever again.

To reach Nate Hansen  
Call 282-7795, Ext. 132, or e-mail to  
nhansen@larsonnewspapers.com