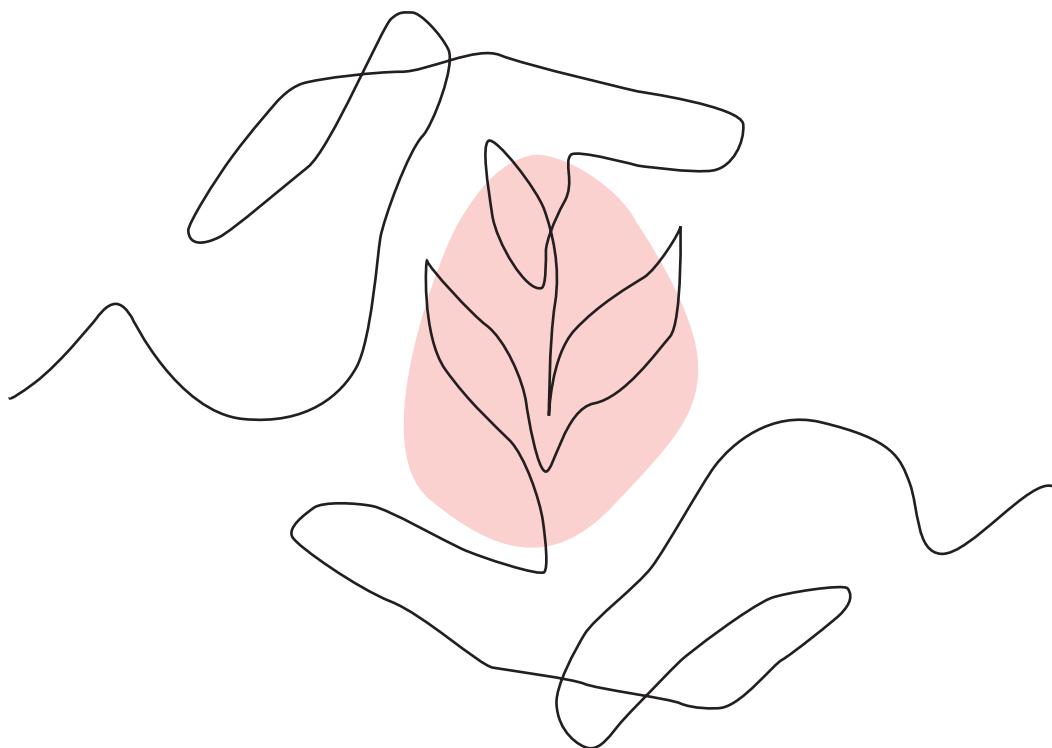


In the words of our patients



At the Swedish Red Cross Treatment Centre for Persons Affected by War and Torture, we meet people every day who have been traumatised by war, torture and during flight. We keep seeing the consequences of this – for the individual, for his or her family, and for the community surrounding that person.

Psychological and physical suffering resulting from such trauma is not due to weakness or shortcomings. The same can happen to anyone who has suffered similar experiences. Yet it can be difficult to take the step and seek help, and equally difficult to find the courage to start treatment.

This is a collection of quotes from people who have taken that step and sought help from us. What has it been like and what has it meant to them? These are words about feeling hope again, having the courage to trust, feeling part of the community and regaining strength and value as a human being.

We hope it can help you take that same step.

Treatment

At the start of treatment

You know, as a bus driver, you can't just look forward. You also have to look in the rearview mirror. Now I am constantly looking in the rearview mirror of life – to remember how it all (the war) started, in order to be prepared if it happens again.

When in treatment

You should not bury your problems underground. You should talk about them. It helped me break the isolation. The door to the past was closed but now it is open, and my memories have been re-activated. Sharing my problems and events with others has changed my mentality; the problem has nothing to do with me. It is a general problem.

Talking about torture – after six months of treatment

It feels good to be able to sit down and get everything out, everything you're carrying inside. I wasn't used to doing that before.

After ten months of treatment

There is less psychological pressure inside me now; it's better to feel you are getting everything that you shut away inside you out into the open.

After ten months of treatment

At the end of treatment

Empowerment and value

The first step is always difficult but if you can just take that one, you will succeed

I've started to realise I'm important, that I have a value. Not like before when I thought the world didn't need me.

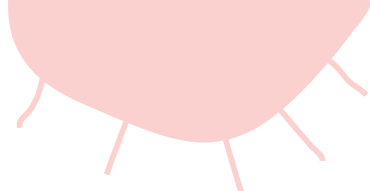
Now I'm empty. Before, the weight was so heavy that I couldn't find my balance but now I can.

I learned that psychological suffering is harder than the physical one. A lot of the body's illnesses are rooted in your mental health – that tension and difficulty in breathing are 'only' signs of stress and can be managed.

Treatment has given me the courage to start talking about the things I experienced – it helped me find the strength to do that.

People who come here have suffered physically AND spiritually. The spiritual part never goes away. It is not easy to talk about what we have gone through, you can't just launch into it. But I had the opportunity to come here and talk as if to a sibling, not as practitioner and patient.

Hello.
Thank you for your letter and all the help I've been given. I've been thinking a lot about my diagnosis and I think it's called "Bird without a nest". Have you ever heard of that diagnosis? Best wishes.



Light at the end of the tunnel

When it's dark, I need someone to wake me up and show me that it's morning, that it's light.

In all the darkness, there has always been a tiny glimmer of light – like in a solar eclipse.

You have to embrace the treatment and work with what you have learnt. Like a child learning to crawl before learning to walk.

I've realised it wasn't actually my fault. I used to blame myself. But I never wanted it to happen. It was their fault really.

Every time I read (my memory) I get sad and my eyes fill with tears but I think I am strong. I'm not empty or worthless. I've come so far in life and been through many difficult things – probably tougher things than many other people – but I've survived.

Physical exercise

I'm so mentally exhausted, but this physical exhaustion, when I exercise, feels so good.

You haven't just taught me about exercise. You've taught me how to be calm so I can tell my story, and accept.

I've found myself. I didn't understand myself before.

Empowerment

The exercise has helped reduce many of my problems, and not just physically, but mentally too, all of my health.

All of us who come here have physical and psychological problems and the physical exercise can't make all the problems disappear but it can make things easier. And when you feel better physically, it's much easier to deal with your mental health problems and overcome them.

I didn't believe in this at all at the start. I wasn't brave enough and I thought it would just cause more problems. But when I finally found the courage, when I actually tried it, I immediately felt that it was the best thing I could do for myself. I got my body back, and that gave me my confidence and energy back, so that I wanted to do things again, to move forward. But it was hard at first, hard to take that first step.

For me, it's the first time I've done exercise in a way that kind of takes you out of your psychological situation, through movement. I've tried different activities before, but this is the only time it's involved kind of working with what you're carrying inside you. You feel that you are changing, what's inside you, your thoughts and emotions... you're working on them but kind of through your body. And it's thanks to your guidance and advice.

After everything we've been through and experienced, prison, abuse, torture, executions... if you want to build and start something new, you have to start with your body. Moving. Finding energy. Fundamental energy to even find any joy in moving forwards. We know this but we can't do it. Unfortunately, the effects of the old problems mean we've lost all our motivation. It's like a nightmare that haunts you every day. So that's why we need you. We wouldn't cope otherwise. We need your support, your knowledge, someone to guide us, to motivate us, so we can just feel a glimmer of hope again.

I've changed thanks to the treatment with the exercise and movement. I feel stronger, more confident, and I've even started to like myself again. And that means I've also started to enjoy talking to other people. Because of everything I had been through, I didn't trust anyone before, not even myself. It's different now. I see things differently, and it's all about trust, trusting myself and others.

Now, whenever I feel stressed or suffocated, I know what to do. I've learned lots of new strategies and I remember the advice. I can do my movements or go out for a walk. This has helped us tremendously in coping with life. Before, there was nothing I could do. I was scared of how I would react and things just got worse and worse. I've always enjoyed physical movement but only when I'm feeling good. Now I do it even when I feel tired or tense. It's like discharging the negative energy inside me.

Group sessions

At first we didn't even say hello to each other, but through sports and movement we got to know each other. And after that... it was like a different feeling between us, and to me... as if something special was happening. It kind of opened everything up for me... it opened the doors to the future, so it even felt possible to go on living.

For me, being able to be part of these groups has led to physical and mental wellbeing, but also social change. It has made us feel more comfortable, so it also feels easier to be part of this new society, and that has opened many doors to good relationships with people around us.

It isn't very easy to acclimatise here. Meeting new people was difficult for me personally, so I couldn't cope with it. But here, in the group, it felt different. We kind of got close to each other, without any pressure or demands being made. We just exercised together and all the rest just came automatically.

The sport and movement make us forget. I think about winning and I laugh with my friends here in the group. It feels like it did when we were young. We are adults now and we have all been through hell... but here we discovered that we can still play, and talk, and even laugh... we actually have a great time when we come here. There's nothing that can make us forget what we've been through, or make our problems disappear, but at least we have this.

When you come to these activities, everything changes. Everything gets easier. But afterwards too, when you go home, your behaviour and your attitude has changed, because you feel good. So big improvements have happened in this area too. How others see you and how they treat you, even your own family. What I mean is that it changes everything, and that was a necessary change for me.

These activities really help us in so many different ways, not just the physical improvement.

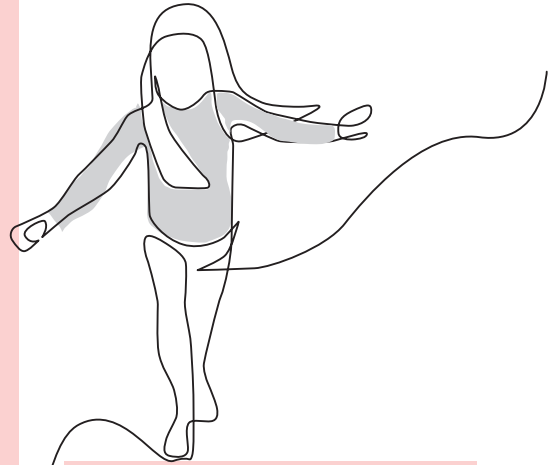
On life situation

The discrimination I've experienced and still experience in Sweden is worse than the torture in prison.

Freedom is the most beautiful thing in life.

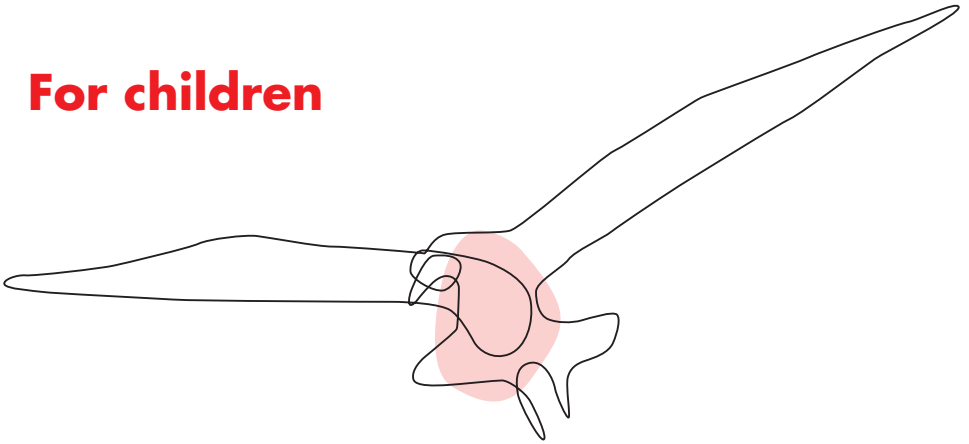
Your approach and your attitude towards us is the most important thing. The staff, that you are always friendly and smiling. Things like that have a huge impact. And the fact that you are well-prepared. We feel you understand us and are always on our side. So all this means we feel happier and more motivated to change our situation. It feels meaningful and makes us want to come back.

From when we crossed the border from our home country, along the entire route of flight, the Red Cross was there. The Red Cross distributed water, food, they set up tents, they had doctors who helped the injured and sick – the Red Cross was everywhere. Therefore, we feel safe here (pointing to the room at the centre).



The Life Management System circle, and the images, show me that my life is connected and manageable after all and the different colors illustrate how my life consists of different things. Thank you for showing me how my life is connected.

For children



Birds in Flight

Thank you for making us feel good.
Child to psychologist

A place that makes my children feel better.
Parent

A place where children make friends.
Parent

Teenage group

We can have at least 1–2 meetings a week throughout the next semester.

Young people to show how appreciated the group has been

Summer camps

After this camp I have three
new things I love
– sausages, meatballs and
swimming!

This is the best day I've had
in Sweden so far.

Parent

You feel calm here.
A child looking towards the lake

Summer activities

Next year we have to go to
Urban Beach again because
I've bought a swimsuit now
and I'm brave enough to
swim.

Parent



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– med filial i Hässleholm

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