

PRESS INFORMATION
For immediate release

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Healing Words - An Evening of Prose and Poetry

Sarum College Hosts the Freedom from Torture's Write to Life Programme

Members of the Write to Life therapeutic creative writing group will present an evening of poetry and prose at Sarum College at 6.30pm on Wednesday 22 February.

The Write to Life programme, run by Freedom from Torture (formerly The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture), provides clients with a creative outlet for their experiences and a way to explore the torture from their past and the difficulties of living in exile. It has evolved as the longest-running therapeutic writing group for torture survivors in the world.

"The Write to Life group has many purposes – assuaging survivor guilt, rebuilding self-respect, giving voice to the voiceless and, above all, taking control of calamitous and destructive memories – all intertwine powerfully," says Sheila Hayman, Write to Life co-ordinator.

"As one writer put it, the rapt attention of an audience is like a mirror in front of her, reassuring her that, after all the horror and degradation, she is still, powerfully and triumphantly, alive."

The group was established in 2000 by award-winning playwright Sonja Linden. Since Hayman took over in 2004, the film-maker and novelist has sought to expand the group's public profile. Write to Life's 20 members now read at a variety of festivals and, through their writing, work to correct misconceptions and myths about asylum seekers and refugees.

The Write to Life evening is part of Sarum College's Art of Healing exhibition of sculpture, paintings, glass and photography which highlights the therapeutic value of art in physical, mental, and spiritual healing. Rachel Bebb, owner of The Garden Gallery in Broughton, Hampshire, is the curatorial consultant.

The exhibition includes a group of paintings by members of Freedom from Torture's art therapy group along with works by Sally Fawkes & Richard Jackson, Elizabeth Herkströter, Charlotte Mayer FRBS, Ruth Oaks, Keith Rand ARBS, Tracey Sheppard FGE, Will Spankie and Ryan Tabor.

"Creative writing and painting are parts of our therapy in helping to rebuild lives broken through mental and physical trauma – our clients have been through unspeakable experiences: their capacity to survive and their determination to rediscover their former skills and uncover new talents is an inspiration to all," says Keith Best, chief executive of Freedom from Torture, who will give a brief introduction to the work and challenges of the charity.

"You will not and cannot forget them – their stories leave a lasting impression of both the depths of depravity to which humanity can sink and the magnificence of the human spirit which can soar above the adversity so that the torturers do not gain the victory."

The Write to Life evening is open to the public. The £5 entry fee and all donations will go directly to the Freedom from Torture charity. The Art of Healing exhibition is free and open to the public. Hours are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday (closed Sundays).

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Photographs

Our Beautiful Photocopy Machine by Hasan and **Tidal Wave** by Uvindu are part of the Freedom from Torture's display of paintings. Both photos by Ash Mills

Flight (bronze) by Charlotte Mayer FRBS. Photo by Steve Russell

'For The Healing of the Nations' (Kosta Boda bowl) by Tracey Sheppard FGE. Photo by Ash Mills

Notes for editors

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Sarum College is an independent ecumenical centre for Christian study and research based at 19 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EE. Sarum College receives no regular funding from churches or other public bodies, and is a registered charity (no. 309501). The college website address is: www.sarum.ac.uk

Freedom From Torture grew out of Amnesty International's Medical Group. Volunteer health professionals campaigned against violations of human rights and documented evidence of torture. It shares expertise with partner organisations in the UK and internationally and operates as a centre of learning and knowledge in the care, treatment and protection of torture survivors.

The Garden Gallery exhibits and sells sculpture, ceramics, glass and furniture for gardens by contemporary artists. Located at Rookery Lane, Broughton, Stockbridge, Hampshire SO20 8AZ, the gallery represents about sixty artists, both well-established and those embarking on their careers. The gallery's website address is: www.gardengallery.uk.com

The Sarum College arts programme forms part of the college's academic programme, which offers a range of courses on theological and spiritual aspects of art, aesthetics, imagination and culture. It includes two major exhibitions every year, with opportunities in between for local schools and local artists to show their work.

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