



ANNUAL REPORT

2021

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“I am very grateful to be part of Eleison.”

They really look after the welfare of their clients. I have learned to develop my skills and prioritize my needs. Aside from the programs, I value the good relationships that I have with the staff. They show sincere concern for me and I am treated as a member of the family. I am happy to belong in the Eleison family. As a client, I feel supported and they have helped me a lot.”

— A.D.,
Survivor and Survivor Leadership Council (SLC) Member

A Letter From Our Founder



Dear Friends:

Thank you for your support for Eleison Foundation. As we reflect on the past year, we are grateful for your partnership, which has enabled us to usher in a new season of growth at Eleison.

Since our inception, the voices and priorities of survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV) have always been at the center of our organization. In consultation with survivors, partners, and community members, in 2021 we decided to broaden our operations in Cebu, Philippines to meet increasing community needs. Throughout this report, you will find updates on how we have begun to expand our programming via four integrated strategies – survivor services, research, capacity building, and grantmaking. As we grow, survivor leadership, research evidence, and community partnership remain at the heart of everything we do.

While the global community has been ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, we

have also seen devastating impacts upon survivors, including loss of employment vital for survival, increases in family violence, mental health challenges, higher rates of suicidal ideation, and alienation from living-giving community support. Throughout the pandemic, our team has worked tirelessly to provide continued access to needed services, while keeping all staff and clients safe in the process. As a grassroots community-based organization, we are able to continually adapt our approach to meet the needs of our clients and adjust to the ever-changing community risks.

Thank you for remaining committed to us throughout this challenging year. We welcome the opportunity to continue on this journey together, supporting survivors as they progress in their recovery and healing.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura".

DR. LAURA CORDISCO TSAI

What We Do

Survivor leadership, research evidence, and community partnership are at the heart of everything we do.



SURVIVOR SERVICES

We help survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence recover from trauma, support their resilience and security, and reduce the risk of re-exploitation. We use trauma informed and evidence-based approaches to address survivors' real needs.



RESEARCH

We work diligently to provide the highest quality programs in the sector. We integrate research into everything we do so that we continually strengthen our programs, building an evidence base for effective practice.



CAPACITY BUILDING

We train and mentor other service providers in survivor-centered, evidence-based, and culturally relevant interventions. We share knowledge from our research and practice to strengthen the quality of care in the broader movement.



GRANTMAKING

We provide small grants for innovative, client-centered, early-stage programs for survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence. We supplement grant funding with technical assistance and research to prepare grantees to scale up effective practices.

About Us

Who We Are



We value research and evidence

We are methodical in figuring out what works. Scientific research on human trafficking is scarce, limiting the effectiveness of anti-trafficking programs. We integrate rigorous research into everything we do, partnering with research scholars, survivors, and communities to make programs more effective. We share what we learn to help everyone in the sector.

We are survivor-centered

The rights, perspectives, and priorities of survivors are at the heart of everything we do. We value survivor leadership, with survivors as key members of our team. We use participatory processes in which survivors continually give input on our programs, which we tangibly put into practice. We center survivor voices and wholeheartedly commit to ethical storytelling.

We're not afraid to do things differently

We value innovative and cutting-edge approaches. We don't need to follow what everyone else is doing. Through our outside-the-box approach, we aim to help the anti-trafficking movement progress and implement more effective and survivor-centered approaches.

We are trauma-informed

We recognize the pervasive impacts of trauma and use trauma-informed approaches in all our work. To support survivors in their recovery, we prioritize safety, choice, collaboration, empowerment, trustworthiness, relationships, and responsiveness to culture, gender, and historical trauma.

We have deep roots in the community

We don't conduct research or train service providers from a distance. We make long-term commitments to the communities in which we are working. We do the work ourselves too. We bring our own experiences providing survivor services to train staff in a supportive manner that is grounded in shared experiences and mutual understanding.

We are a bridge between systems

Through integrating our research with our practice, we bring together stakeholders that often work separately. We bridge the gap between academia, survivors, and communities toward a common goal of more effective programs and services.



Survivor Services Survivor Leadership Council

We believe in the importance of survivor leadership. The Survivor Leadership Council (SLC) is an advisory board of human trafficking and gender-based violence survivors who have graduated from at least one of Eleison's programs.

SLC members co-facilitate activities for new clients with Eleison staff, with survivors taking an active role in peer mentorship and modeling. SLC members partner with our staff to ensure Eleison's programs and research are survivor-centered.

In 2021, Eleison's SLC is comprised of four graduates from Eleison's Barug and Bansay programs. SLC members have also assumed leadership roles in Eleison's community-based participatory research, serving as co-researchers alongside Eleison staff.

Why it matters

- Survivors' voices have often not been centered in the anti-human trafficking movement, hindering the effectiveness of anti-trafficking programming and policy.
- Excluding survivors from decision-making processes reinforces harmful patterns from survivors' trauma histories, including a lack of power, choice, and control.
- Survivors are the most knowledgeable about their own experiences. Their perspectives, priorities, needs, and recommendations must be at the core of efforts to strengthen policy and practice.

Survivor Services

Barug Savings Program

Barug is a two-year economic empowerment program for survivors and their family members.

The program has three components:

1. **Matched savings program.** For all money participants save in the program, Eleison matches their savings at a 1:1 ratio. The matched funds can be used for education, medical care, family and personal emergencies, housing repair, and employment expenses.

2. **Financial literacy training course.** This group skills-building course covers savings, budgeting, debt management, financial negotiation with family members and peers, and emotional wellness and self-care.

3. **Individual and peer support sessions.** Individual support sessions provide survivors an opportunity to revisit their goals, discuss progress, celebrate successes, and brainstorm solutions. Group support sessions facilitate opportunities for peer support and learning.



"I always think that I don't have hope in life because of lots of debts. I even thought about committing suicide because my debt affected me so much. I was irritable and I easily got angry. I always fought with my partner and parents because of my problems with debt, but now after Barug, I feel hopeful again."

— Barug Graduate



Survivor Services Bansay Program

Bansay – adj. (Cebuano) skillful; beginning to stand

A brief financial literacy training course for survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence, followed by individualized support sessions.

This training course provides a preliminary introduction to savings and financial management. Bansay was designed as a stepping stone to Barug, Eleison’s two-year matched savings program.

The training covers savings, budgeting, debt management, financial negotiation with family members and peers, and emotional wellness and self-care. After Bansay, Eleison offers individualized support sessions to help each participant achieve his/her goals.

Why it matters

- Poverty and financial insecurity are key risk factors for human trafficking and exploitation. Survivors themselves identify financial security as one of their highest priorities.

- Eleison’s own research has found that participation in financial education and supportive counseling can have both financial and psychological benefits.

- Not all survivors are immediately ready for Eleison’s two-year matched savings program, Barug. Bansay provides an opportunity for survivors to connect with ideas that can be later explored in-depth during Barug, and to build trust and rapport with Eleison staff.

Survivor Services Community Mental Health

Healing in a Safe, Supportive Community

Mental health concerns – such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, and post-traumatic stress – are common for survivors. In Southeast Asia, mental health services are stigmatized and extremely limited. We provide accessible and culturally-sensitive mental health services for survivors in safe and trusted community-based settings.

In 2021, we piloted a new program at Eleison in partnership with Healing and Resilience after Trauma (HaRT). HaRT is a 12-week group intervention that integrates physical yoga poses, breath work, guided visualizations, and discussions for holistic healing. The program is informed by recent advances in trauma theory and neuroscience, and feminist principles emphasizing safety and consent. HaRT creates a nurturing environment where survivors can reconnect with their inner resilience, build a supportive community, and overcome the psychological effects of trauma.



“This session can cultivate personal grounding wherein we are able to hold the powerful truths we have for ourselves. The self-affirmations are powerful and empowering. They reminded me of who I really am – that I am capable, that I have this inner strength, and no one can take it away from me. This session is truly empowering.”

— HaRT Program Participant



Survivor Services Crisis Intervention

Survivors experience many forms of crisis in their recovery, including suicidality, experiences of violence from their families and communities, homelessness, and acute mental health crises.

The Eleison team provides immediate, short-term counseling and psychosocial support for survivors in crisis. We connect survivors with emergency services needed to help them stabilize, stay safe, and build coping skills and stronger support systems.

We use evidence-based interventions that have been culturally adapted for survivors in the Filipino context. Following immediate intervention, we provide ongoing monitoring and supportive services until the crisis situation de-escalates and stabilizes.

Why it matters

- Research has found high rates of suicidal ideation and attempts among human trafficking survivors. For example, recent research studies have shown that over 50% of survivors report suicidal ideation and over 40% report ever attempting suicide.
- Most anti-trafficking staff in low-resource contexts have not received training in evidence-based mental health interventions, including suicide prevention.
- Since survivors often experience familial rejection, community stigmatization, and a deep lack of social support, crisis intervention services from trained and trusted staff are critical in supporting survivor safety and enhancing healthy coping skills.

Survivor Services Typhoon Emergency Relief



In December 2021, Super Typhoon Rai (known locally as Odette) devastated the Philippines, including Cebu, where we operate. Given the disproportionate impact of the typhoon on vulnerable communities, the Eleison team immediately began outreach to our clients and provided emergency food, water, and financial assistance to survivors and their families.



Super Typhoon Odette Emergency Relief

Eleison's typhoon response program entailed four phases of emergency support. In Phase 1, we gave emergency in-kind assistance to address lacking water and food insecurity, delivering relief goods to clients' homes days after the typhoon hit Cebu. In Phases 2 and 3, we provided psychosocial support, along with cash transfers for housing repair, health and mental health concerns, food insecurity, and other crises. In the final phase, we prioritized mental health support and referrals to community services.

"You are the organization that always gives me strength and reminds me of the strength I already have in order to move forward. Even with all the difficulties, you are there. During difficult, worrying, and painful times, you are there. Thank you very much to all of you and especially to Ms. Laura. I hope that you are able to help more people like me and that God gives you more blessings."

– Typhoon Emergency Relief Recipient

Capacity Building Training Service Providers



Eleison conducts training and capacity building for agencies serving survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence. We train and mentor service providers in evidence-based, survivor-centered, and culturally-congruent interventions to make programs more effective.



Crisis Intervention Training Program

Crisis intervention refers to immediate, short-term counseling and psychosocial support for people experiencing significant emotional, mental, and physical distress. Mental health crises are common for survivors, but service providers often lack skills to support survivors in crisis, leaving survivors vulnerable and staff feeling stressed and ill-equipped. Eleison trains and mentors service providers in how to conduct effective crisis intervention.



Motivational Interviewing (MI) Training Program

MI is a person-centered, collaborative, evidence-based counseling approach to strengthening a person's motivation for and commitment to change. MI represents a "way of being" with clients based upon four vital components: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation. The person-centered nature of MI makes it particularly appropriate for survivors. Eleison trains service providers in how to integrate MI in their work with survivors.

Grantmaking Healing and Resilience after Trauma

Overcoming Trauma, Building Community, Connecting with Inner Resilience

Eleison provides small grants for innovative, early-stage, client-centered programs for survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence. In addition to financial support and technical assistance, we prioritize monitoring and evaluation to build an evidence base and prepare effective early-stage programs for expansion.

In 2021, our grantee was Healing and Resilience after Trauma (HaRT). HaRT is a 12-week mental health intervention involving mindfulness and yoga, originally developed for human trafficking survivors in Uganda. Eleison provided HaRT with technical and financial support to revise their intervention curriculum based on survivor feedback and research evaluation findings. Through the grant from Eleison, the HaRT team developed a resource packet to train new HaRT facilitators and expand the program beyond Uganda.



67% of HaRT participants in Uganda reported elevated post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (PTSD) at the beginning of HaRT, compared to **0%** at the end.

55% of participants reported depression symptoms at the beginning of HaRT compared to **11%** at the end.



Research Healing and Resilience after Trauma

We integrate research into everything we do. In 2021, Eleison collaborated with Healing and Resilience after Trauma (HaRT) to pilot HaRT's 12-week mental health intervention integrating yoga and mindfulness in the Philippines. The goal of the pilot was to elicit input needed to adapt the intervention for implementation with survivors in Cebu, Philippines.

Throughout the pilot, we collected weekly feedback from pilot participants regarding their experiences in the HaRT program. The Eleison team also conducted post-pilot focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand how the program should be adapted for the Filipino cultural context.

"This HaRT session can help clients feel less isolated and alone, which is very often how survivors feel after their experience of traumatic events."

- **HaRT Pilot Participant**

Why it matters

- HaRT is a low-tech intervention that can be implemented by non-mental health professionals. HaRT is suitable for low-resource contexts where trauma recovery programs are greatly needed but often unavailable for survivors.
- Given the lack of mental health services available for survivors in the Philippines, HaRT has the potential to address an existing gap as a cost-effective and accessible strategy to promote the psychological and social wellbeing of survivors.
- Eleison is utilizing the feedback from this HaRT pilot assessment to adapt the program for survivors in the Philippines. The Eleison team will begin implementing the adapted intervention in 2022, and will conduct research to understand the impact upon survivors.

Research Barug Program Assessment

Assessing Eleison's Matched Savings and Financial Literacy Program

Barug (meaning "to stand up" in Cebuano) is a two-year matched savings and financial literacy program for survivors and their family members. We collaborated with a partner organization to collect quantitative and qualitative data to understand the impact of participation in Barug upon our clients.

The Barug program assessment revealed positive impacts both upon survivors' financial stability, as well as their psychosocial wellbeing. In addition to increased savings rates and decreased debt, assessment findings showed enhanced financial management skills and a heightened future orientation. Further, Barug participants described the psychosocial impact of joining Barug – increased decision-making power, greater confidence in managing family financial pressures, and lower levels of stress.



Over 400% Increase

- The average amount of savings reported by participants increased over **400%** from before Barug to after Barug graduation.
- **70%** of Barug graduates reported having savings after Barug compared to **30%** before Barug.

Our Partners

Through integrating our research with our practice, we bring together stakeholders that often work separately. We bridge the gap between academia, survivors, and communities toward a common goal of more effective programs and services.



Join us in empowering advocates to reduce human trafficking and gender-based violence around the world. Email us at info@eleisonfoundation.org

Our Team



**DR. LAURA
CORDISCO TSAI**
Founder and
Executive Director



**CHERRY LYNN
O. BONACHITA**
Director of Administration



**CARMINA CHARMAINE
G. DOMINGO**
Clinical Program Coordinator



**CHILOU L.
BENITEZ**
Research Associate



**FE DAYEEN A.
TUDTUD**
Community Worker



**ELIZABETH
HENTSCHEL**
Research Consultant



D.M.R.O.
Peer Facilitator



D.E.O.
Peer Facilitator

"It's not every day that you find the opportunity to work for an organization where you get to be who you are, share what you have, do what you love, and grow to be the person you want to be. When Eleison offered that opportunity, I humbly and gratefully accepted it. Every day is a learning experience and everyone I talk to becomes my teacher."

- **Carmina Charmaine G. Domingo, Clinical Program Coordinator**

Advisory Board



**DR. TERRIANN
NICHOLSON**
Advisor



**DR. CATHERINE
CARLSON**
Advisor



**PRISCILLA GONZALES
FERNANDO**
Advisor



**DR. MALABIKA
DAS**
Advisor



**IVY F.
SEBALLOS-LLENA**
Advisor



**DR. TINA
JIWATRAM-NEGRÓN**
Advisor

Survivor Leadership Council



M.C.A.



S.G



A.D



R.H.A.

Staff Spotlight

Cherry Lynn O. Bonachita
Director of Administration



Why did you decide to work at Eleison?

I wanted to work in an organization that has a social impact. I am a person of structure and for me, there is no better way to be involved in supporting the vulnerable in the society than in a structured way. I feel I cannot just help on my own. I need to be connected to an organization that does this and I'm glad that Eleison gave me the opportunity to be involved. I am thankful because I have been working at Eleison for 6 years now.

What is your favorite part of working at Eleison?

I like that I get to work on the things I do best and still learn something new. I like the training that Eleison provides not just to the staff but also to other agencies that serve the same population. The personal and professional growth opportunities that Eleison provides are commendable to me. The training is not only geared towards building our own profile, but it's provided because there is a need to apply it with the population that we serve. I like that it's training for service to others.

What inspires you or keeps you going in your work?

This is always what I encourage staff when we face issues: we are not doing this for ourselves but we're doing this for our clients. If we are able to support others the best we can, then that for me is a reward. I think that is my inspiration to keep going – to support our clients, we need to keep moving, existing, and serving.

Advisor Spotlight

Dr. Catherine Carlson
Advisory Board Member



Where do you work and what are your areas of expertise?

I am an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Alabama in the United States. I am also Co-Director of Healing and Resilience after Trauma (HaRT). My areas of expertise are global mental health, trauma, and violence prevention.

How do you collaborate with Eleison?


I am delighted to serve as an Advisory Board Member of Eleison where I provide support on best practices in crisis intervention, community mental health, and holistic healing practices for survivors, as well as research and evaluation. I also collaborate with Eleison in my role as HaRT Co-Director on implementing HaRT Yoga, a trauma-informed yoga intervention to promote physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

Why do you support Eleison's work?

I support Eleison's work because I believe in their survivor-centered, participatory approach with clients. I also appreciate their dedication to learning and evaluating their programs to continually improve their impact.

What challenges have you seen the Eleison team overcome in 2021?

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have an unprecedented impact on Eleison's clients and the organization's work. I am continually impressed with how they have overcome the challenges of the pandemic through flexibility, compassion, and hard work.



“When I became a peer facilitator, my self-esteem and self-confidence boosted.

I am very grateful to Eleison for seeing my skills, capabilities, and potential, and for them giving me a role where I am able to tell myself that I can do something more and that I can make a contribution. I am proud of myself and I am grateful for the trust that has been given to me. Being a source of inspiration and hearing other clients say the impact that my experience has on them is my greatest achievement.”

L.R.,
Survivor and Peer Facilitator



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