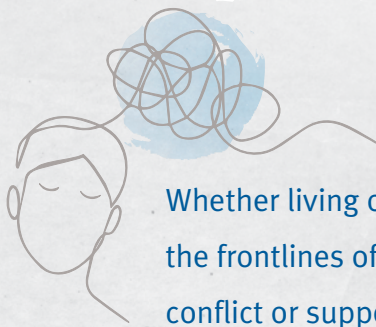


Prioritizing mental health in social justice



Whether living on the frontlines of conflict or supporting

social justice movements from afar—**the strain of injustice and violence takes a toll.**

This Bulletin shares how counterparts in Burma and Colombia are **making mental health a priority.** From participating in workshops on trauma-informed reporting and self-care, to creating safe spaces for legal staff accompanying LGBTQI+ survivors of violence, and training community health workers to address a spike in mental health needs—our counterparts are fostering communities of care and bolstering overall wellbeing.

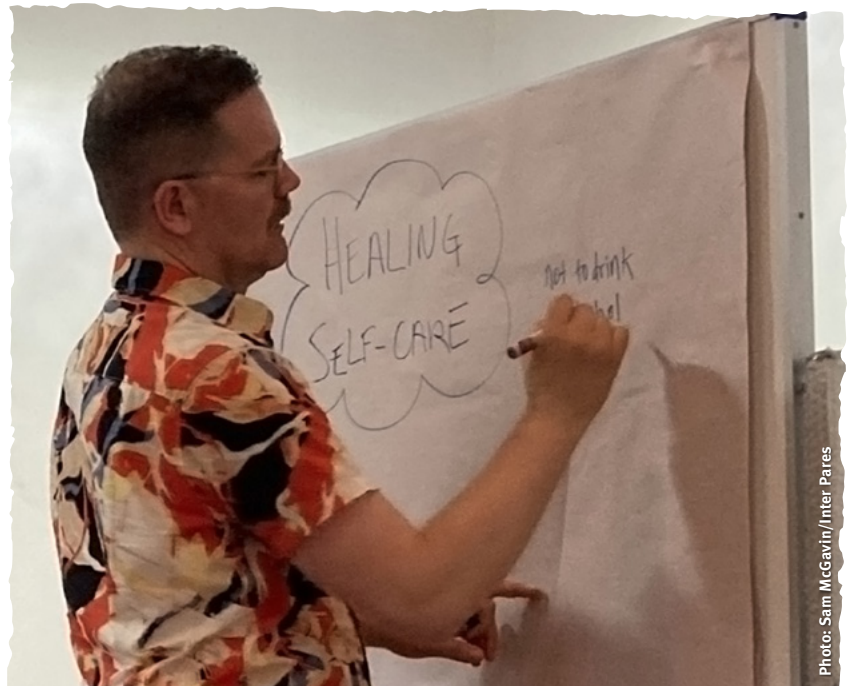


Photo: Sam McGavin/Inter Pares

Matthew Pearson, a journalism professor at Carleton University delivers capacity-building workshops on trauma-informed reporting and self-care for Indigenous journalists from Burma.

The mental strain of war reporting in Burma

Reporting on the war in Burma comes at a cost. Since the February 2021 military coup d'état, over 200 journalists have been arrested. Approximately 60 journalists remain behind bars. The military has killed at least seven journalists. Many more have fled their homelands and are forced to [work in exile](#)¹ from Burma's neighbouring countries. ►

¹ <https://www.interpares.ca/news/scaling-mountains-report-news>

Reporters from Burma are resolute in the role they play in the struggle for peace and democracy.

◀ **Regardless of where they report from, journalists covering the atrocities of the military junta are paying a further price: their mental health.**

Inter Pares collaborated with Matthew Pearson, a journalism professor at Carleton University, to deliver capacity-building [workshops on trauma-informed reporting](https://carleton.ca/sjc/2024/pearson-inter-pares-thailand/)² and self-care for Indigenous journalists from Burma. Journalists from five Inter Pares-supported media organizations along the Thailand-Burma border participated in Matthew's workshops. While many participants are based in Thailand for their safety, a few reporters made the perilous journey to the border from war-torn areas in Burma just to participate.

"The workshop taught me to prioritize my well-being by taking time for self-care and openly discussing issues with colleagues dealing with stress or PTSD. We work to create a positive environment for everyone," says Sai Muang, editor in chief of Shan Herald Agency for News.

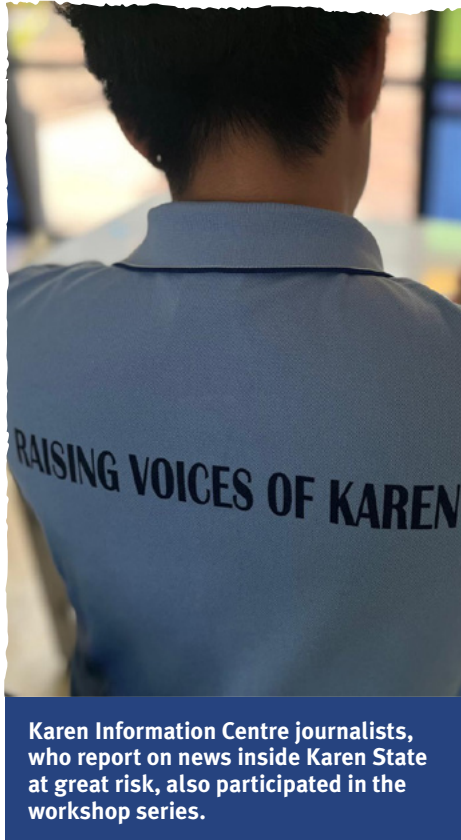



Photo: Matthew Pearson

Between deadly airstrikes, human rights abuses, and the massive amount of people constantly fleeing to survive, Indigenous journalists from Burma report on harrowing events every day. But it's not only exposure to the subject matter that wreaks havoc on their mental health. "[Our reporters]

are living in very unsafe surroundings. **They are worried they will be arrested, they do not know freedom of movement,**" one editor told Matthew after the workshop. "These kinds of situations make them traumatized."

Support for Indigenous media groups and women journalists are key components of Inter Pares' programming in Burma. It is essential that conflict-affected people have access to accurate information, in their own languages. **Indigenous perspectives also need to be represented in the news and analysis coming out of Burma for the world to get a full picture of the conflict.**

The psychological price journalists pay is significant. Matthew's workshops are one way Inter Pares supports them in this challenging and vital work. Despite the costs, reporters from Burma are resolute in the role they play in the struggle for peace and democracy.

Our program is undertaken in partnership with the Government of Canada. 

² <https://carleton.ca/sjc/2024/pearson-inter-pares-thailand/>

Addressing urgent mental health in post-coup Burma

“Everyone needs psychosocial support these days,”

Back Pack Health Workers Team, an Inter Pares counterpart in Burma, told Inter Pares staff recently.

Counterparts across Burma are seeing a spike in mental health issues, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 coup d’état. Alongside providing essential health services, they are responding to the **growing need for mental health support.**

Back Pack Health Workers Team (BPHWT) is training community health workers in Karen and Karenni states through a five-day intensive program on mental health. This training is particularly necessary in remote and conflict-affected areas, where communities don’t have access to institutional supports. BPHWT is also cognizant of the mental health needs and wellbeing of their team and their families, given the harsh reality of the context they also live, and work in.

Another long-term Inter Pares counterpart, Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), recently resumed online




Photo: Mae Tao Clinic

Mental health and psychosocial support training for health workers at Mae Tao Clinic.

and in-person counselling services on the Thailand-Burma border which had been on hold for two years following the coup. MTC also trains all health workers in psychological first aid, teaching them how to identify issues and make referrals.

Our counterparts in Burma support the health needs of over 750,000 people living in nearly 2,000 villages across the country and in the border regions. **Mental health is a**

crucial component of overall health. Inter Pares is inspired by our counterparts in Burma, who in the face of conflict and crises, continue to build their capacity and effectively respond to the emerging needs of their communities. 

Alongside health services, counterparts in Burma are responding to the urgent need for mental health support.

Behind the scenes of LGBTQI+ Advocacy: A mental health conversation with Valentina Parra

Valentina Parra is a feminist lawyer with Colombia Diversa, an Inter Pares counterpart advocating for LGBTQI+ rights in Colombia. She leads a team of lawyers who work alongside LGBTQI+ survivors of violence, supporting their pursuit of justice and litigating on their behalf.

It is heavy work. And it takes a mental toll.

We recently spoke with Valentina to find out how she and her team take care of their mental health while doing this crucial work.

Interview edited for length and clarity.

Q: How is your team building mental health care into your work?

A: We have regular group meetings guided by a psychologist. They're safe spaces for us to share what has been hard in our work, because we work with people living in crises and conflict contexts. Before we started having these meetings, we weren't able to talk about

any of this. The whole team thought being professional meant keeping everything in.

Now we have a specific space to talk about mental health where we're sure nobody will judge the quality of our work because of what we are feeling.

Q: Have there been challenges since starting these meetings?

A: When we first started, we kept rescheduling and postponing them. We have a lot of urgent work – something always felt more important than these meetings.

But we realized we couldn't see mental wellness as optional, an accessory thing to deal with later once you're sick. These meetings, these conversations, are also urgent. We decided to set a regular meeting every month and prioritize it.

Q: Why is it important to you to share your team's mental health practices?

A: Because we need to make mental healthcare part of the job. If you work in a laboratory,



Valentina Parra at a rally promoting the rights of LGBTQ+ refugee claimants in Toronto.

Photo: Bill Fairbairn/Inter Pares

you put on your lab coat and mask. You have all this equipment protecting you. When you finish your work, you take off your work clothes, wash your hands and try not to bring home what you're working with in the lab.

But when you work with social violence, if you don't have a routine of how to leave the office, finish the day and stop thinking about violence, you will bring it to your home.

Q: How do the mental health policies that your team has put in place show your feminist values?

A: We need to take care of each other. The responsibility is with us to care for one another and build community. And I think there's nothing more feminist than that. 🌈

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequalities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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