Amber Gray (MA Somatic Counseling Psychology '99), who has lived and worked in Haiti on and off for the last twelve years, has made two trips there since a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated the country in January. Gray is a licensed psychotherapist and a Board Certified Dance/Movement Therapist (BC-DMT) with expertise in developing culturally congruent treatment models that help individuals and communities overcome trauma.

She directs the Santa Fe, NM–based Restorative Resources Consulting and Training, LLC, which offers psychotherapy, training and program development throughout the world. Her nonprofit, Trauma Resources International (TRI), offers aid to survivors of extreme trauma. Close to $700 was raised for the nonprofit by Naropa University’s Somatic Counseling Psychology Department. Gray has raised about $7,500, and she’s distributed medical and hygiene supplies, including essential oils that help mask the smells of death and human waste.

During Gray’s counseling sessions, she hears many stories about how people in the capital city of Port-au-Prince survived the earthquake and their efforts to save family and friends. In a blog entry dated February 25, she wrote, “Each story weaves a collective history that has altered Haiti forever. Thirty-five seconds and the world is completely changed. One of my good friends said ‘The Haiti we said goodnight to on January 11—she’s gone. She cannot come back.’”

Through her nonprofit, Gray is partnering with three Haitian organizations that will be doing much of the ongoing community and mental health work: IDEO, URAMEL and Athletique D’Haiti. IDEO, founded and directed by well-known psychologists, has expertise in developing community-based mental health and psychosocial programming. URAMEL provides training to mental health, medical and healthcare professionals who treat Haiti’s many victims of disaster, violence and torture. A program under the URAMEL umbrella will provide services, training, research and capacity building. Athletique D’Haiti, an afterschool support and tutoring program, normally provides education, food and activities for youth, but currently its resources are supporting one thousand families camped on the founder’s property.

TRI fundraising will continue to support longer term programming, Gray says, explaining plans for training in psychological first aid and somatic and arts-based therapies for clinicians, caregivers, community leaders and others who are in a position to provide counseling and psychosocial support.

“The idea is a train-the-trainers model so that various levels of professionals across Haiti are prepared to support the people of Haiti who are making many requests for psychological assistance,” Gray says.

Each day in Haiti, Gray works long hours conducting group and individual counseling sessions and strategizing with nongovernmental organizations on collaborations to support program staff, who she says are working ten to sixteen hour days serving beneficiaries while also dealing with their own losses, traumas and stressors.

“Somatic, contemplative and arts therapies are always the foundation of my clinical work, whether it’s in this context or in Albuquerque with refugees from Iraq,” Gray says. “Contemplative practice definitely supports this work. I cannot imagine listening to the stories without this practice, which I learned at Naropa.” —Brenda Gillen