A Biannual Newsletter

Serving Landmine Survivors

CLEAR PATH INTERNATIONAL

Winter/Spring 2007

Families and Communities

Meet the Challenge!

There Is Still Time to Contribute Towards the $60,000 Match From the U.S. State Department

Clear Path is in a final push to meet the $60,000 matching challenge from the U.S. State Department's Office of Weapons Removal & Abatement for its survivor assistance work in Vietnam.

So far, the organization has raised $55,000 with $35,000 coming from the Nov. 5 benefit at the Edgewater in Seattle, $17,000 from the Dec. 17 benefit concert with Judy Collins in Dorset and the remainder from other donors.

Donors have until the end of spring to make a contribution that will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the State Department.

Since it started in Vietnam six years ago, Clear Path has assisted more than 3,000 landmine accident survivors and their families in central Vietnam -- all with grassroots support or grants from charitable foundations.

In Vietnam, Clear Path offers emergency medical assistance to new landmine accident survivors in 14 provinces on the country's central coast where most of the war's unexploded ordnance remains. In addition, it offers a comprehensive set of medical and socio-economic services to existing survivors in the districts of Vinh Linh and Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province and in Le Thuy district, Quang Binh Province.

With private-sector contributions worth $60,000 and the State Department's match of $60,000, Clear Path hopes to expand its services to both new and existing survivors in central Vietnam. Last year, CPI responded to 88 new accidents and assisted more than 600 existing victims.

"Individual donors can not only make a contribution that makes a big difference in the everyday lives of landmine accident survivors and is tax-deductible, any donation gets doubled by the government's challenge grant," said Martha Hathaway, CPI's executive director.

Contribute Now and Your Donation Will be Doubled!
Use the Enclosed Envelope to Send Your Personal Check
Or Donate On-line at www.cpi.org

A double-amputee landmine survivor and his friend at the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. Photo credit: Lobke Dijkstra.

"With My Own Two Hands:" Life on Thai-Burma Border

By Lobke Dijkstra, physical therapist & volunteer Thailand representative

Editor's Note: Clear Path sponsors round-the-clock care for 15 severely disabled landmine accident survivors at the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. Full names of the CPI visitors to the "villa" are on page 2. James Low is a supporter from Canada.

MAE LA, Thailand -- Do you know that feeling when a plan works out? When your efforts seem to result in truly making a difference? When some crisscrossed points turn out to show just the perfect picture when you draw a line, connecting the dots? When your goal comes clearly into sight after broadly checking out the environment, not exactly knowing what you were looking for at first? Well, that's the kind of feeling I had when I met Imbert, Wolfgang, Lori and James last weekend. They were on the last leg of a three-week trip to see all of Clear Path's projects in Southeast Asia. I had just started volunteering in the Mae Tao clinic in Mae Sot. The perfect time to pass on the baton!

It was earlier this year when I first learned about Clear Path International. I returned home after traveling through Southeast Asia and decided that it was time to stop dreaming. “If you really want to work with landmine victims, you'll have to switch into action-mode. Just go and do it,” I told myself. And so I did. It took another few months, a detour through different countries and several emails back and forth to Imbert, before I finally met them.

And there I was, among this small group of special people, everyone in their own way dedicated to the work of CPI, sitting in the Care Villa at the Mae La refugee camp on a Saturday afternoon in August.

Imagine that you lose both your sight and your hands in a landmine accident. Besides the extreme difficulty in staying “in touch” with the world, what would you be able to do, practically speaking? How would you feed yourself, wash yourself, find the toilet before it's too late? I never realized that this might be the most limiting combination of physical disabilities one might get. Many of the landmine survivors who stay at the Care Villa have to face this fact. These severely damaged, still beautiful people found a way to spend their time, to challenge and express themselves by making music and singing their own, personal songs. That Saturday we were there to record their voices, their stories, their lives. It is hard to catch this amazing experience in words or in pictures. An experience that will stay in my mind for a long time.

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CPI's HIPPO HIP IN CAMBODIA

Group Health Medical Donation Sent to Five Countries

SIEM REAP, Cambodia -- The hippopotamus was never indigenous to Cambodia, but that didn't stop the young patients at the Angkor Hospital for Children from falling in love with it. Disguised as an exam table, the plumb round snouty creature traveled all the way from the Group Health Central Hospital in Seattle to Siem Reap, the city known for the ancient temples of Angkor Wat but also its abject poverty. And there, its big happy face charms and soothes every child who comes through the double doors of the emergency room.

The hippo exam table was part of a large-scale two-year series of surplus equipment donations from health care provider Group Health to Clear Path International. Group Health gave more than $313,605 worth of medical and kitchen equipment to Clear Path, which in turn sent it in 40-foot ocean containers to hospitals in Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Pakistan and El Salvador.

The Group Health items, many of which were simply eclipsed by new technology in the U.S. healthcare field but still very desirable overseas, came from the company's provider's campuses in Redmond, Tacoma, Seattle and Tukwila. They included gurneys, exam tables, ENT chairs, microscopes, bone-cutting tools, crash carts, anesthesia machines, pediatric stretchers, casting tables, infant scales, oxygen tents, scrub sinks, sleeper chairs, wheelchairs, crutches and cribs.

In some cases, such as the two containers that went to the earthquake region in Pakistan, the equipment was sent as relief goods for the reconstruction effort. With the help of the Rotary Club of Bainbridge Island, Clear Path combined some of the medical equipment from Group Health with clothes, tents, tools and school supplies collected in an island-wide relief drive for Mansehra, 20 miles from the earthquake's epicenter.

In the case of the other containers, the medical equipment was used to serve impoverished patient populations in Cambodia and Vietnam.

In central Vietnam, hundreds of patients suffering from landmine accidents, polio or the genetic effects of Agent Orange flock to the Da Nang Orthopedic & Rehabilitation Center. The hospital had a minimally equipped operating room for just two patients and needed more sophisticated equipment. From the Group Health donation, Clear Path sent two anesthesia machines, a C-arm and patient monitors to the facility, where they are now being used effectively to treat a growing number of patients.

A charity that serves poor communities and barrios in the Philippines was the recipient of a container of kitchen equipment that came from the Group Health central campus in Seattle. That shipment included refrigerators, dish warmers, beverage dispensers, tray holders, sinks and many other items perfect for setting up a large-scale food service for the poor.

Clear Path International has sent 64 containers to hospitals, clinics and charities in 25 countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa since it began its medical aid program to hospitals five years ago.

The goal is to strengthen well-managed institutions that focus on providing services to the disabled and underprivileged. The Angkor Hospital for Children, the hippo's new home, is a good case in point. It's a bustling place in the center of Siem Reap, tucked between the Center market and some of the big hotels. It was started by a Japanese photographer who frequented the nearby temples of Angkor Wat and discovered the plight of the area's children suffering from HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, tropical diseases, tuberculosis, polio and other serious conditions. The hospital staff, which includes international volunteers, sees an average of 300 children per day and its annual patient load is up to 70,000.

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One song in particular hit me and, to use Imbert's word's, “Went straight to my heart”. Freely translated, it goes something like this:

“I lost my eyes, so I can't look at you.
I lost my arms, so I can't hold you.
I lost my legs, so I can't come with you.
My heart is broken, but I've still got my voice.
So I'll sing.”

It reminds me of a song from Jack Johnson and Ben Harper, who are fortunate enough to live in a country without the ongoing threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Their song contrasts with the one of our friends at the Care Villa, but brings it together at the same time.

“I can change the world, with my own two hands.
I can clean up the earth, with my own two hands.
I'm gonna make it a safer place, with my own two hands.
I can reach out to you, with my own two hands.
But you've got to use your own two hands.
Use your own two hands.”

It reflects my idea about the work of CPI. People who know that the world can only be improved by using your own two hands. I see, with my own eyes, that we can make a difference. That I can make a difference. By using my own two hands.

Lobke Dijkstra.

Clear Path International

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Clear Path International is an independent 501 C 3 nonprofit registered with the IRS. Clear Path has offices on Bainbridge Island, Wash., in Dorset, Vermont; Dong Ha, Vietnam; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Mae Sot, Thailand. For contact details and volunteer opportunities, please visit: www.cpi.org

Huyen & Thien Know: Love Is Blind

Two UXO Survivors in Vietnam Find Each Other

CAM LO, Vietnam -- It isn't every day that CPI staff in Vietnam get to attend a wedding, let alone a nuptial ceremony of one of its beneficiaries. But the wedding earlier this year between Huyen and Thien, both survivors of bomb accidents, was even more special.

The young couple had met each other at Center for the Blind in Cam Lo, where Thien makes a living making brooms by hand and she came to teach the center's 14 members how to read Braille. Huyen can see somewhat -- general shapes, enough to locate a path or a house and help Thien find his way. He cannot see anything.

Thien was blinded and lost all the fingers on his left hand in 1977 when he was 5. He was playing outside his home and saw a shiny, semi-buried object nearby. He picked it up and started taking it apart when the blasting cap exploded in his hand.

In 1983, when Huyen was only 2 she was injured in her face by shrapnel after her 9-year-old brother struck "a shiny metal tube" with a rock, detonating a piece of wartime ammunition.

After Huyen and Thien met at the Blind Center, she was transferred to Cam Lo from her job at the Provincial Blind Association and they were around each other almost every day. Still, it took them three years to decide to marry as a blind couple. It was something all their friends and family supported except Huyen's mother who struggled raising a family and was afraid her daughter's life would be more difficult than her own.

The gentle and unassuming couple plans to live at his parents' house for now. CPI provided them with a grant for $620 to expand the family's modest cinder-block home where Thien now makes his brooms. In the future, Clear Path will buy the family a cow to boost their income.

Watching Thien make a broom with only one good hand and entirely by touch is nothing short of miraculous, particularly the speed at which he accomplishes a task that would be challenging for anyone!

CPI began its comprehensive victim assistance program for existing survivors in Cam Lo district, Quang Tri Province, this year and expects to support several hundred accident survivors over the next several years.

NEWS BRIEFS

Landmine Frisbee Campaign in Singapore Raises Awareness for CPI

SINGAPORE -- To help raise awareness of the landmine crisis worldwide, and the work of Clear Path International, David Chee at the advertising firm of Rapp Collins created frisbees that look like landmines and volunteers are tossing them around the city. When someone picks one up, a message on the other side tells the reader that the simple act of picking up what you think is a toy in landmine-plagued communities can get you killed... it then encourages people to go to the web site of Clear Path International (http://www.cpi.org) to help landmine and bomb survivors.

Children are often killed by explosive remnants of war because they think the bombs/mines are toys. It is important to note that Singapore is not an area where landmines are a problem.

Clear Path Visits Laos

VIENTIANE, Laos -- For the first time this summer, Clear Path visited the fourth country in SE Asia still deeply scarred from the war in Indochina. A small CPI group traveled to Laos from Vietnam and stayed for three days to meet with government and nonprofit groups that assist landmine accident survivors in the mountainous land-locked country.

During the war, the same explosives were used in Vietnam and Laos. All along the Lao border with Vietnam ran the Ho Chi Minh trail and it was targeted by U.S. forces for years, making Laos the most bombarded country in the world. Accurate figures are hard to come by, but rough estimates put the number of UXO survivors in Laos at about 2,500, with 140 new accident survivors joining their ranks each year.

CPI representatives were guests of COPE, the Cooperative Orthotic & Prosthetic Enterprise, which brings together organizations that work in the field of mobility disability in Laos. These include the National Rehabilitation Center of the Ministry of Health, World Vision, Association for Aid & Relief Japan and the Leprosy Mission International of Singapore.

Medical Program Moves To New Location

SEATTLE -- After five years at Kevin Sutherland's Commercial Floor Distributors, Clear Path has moved its medical supply program to a new Seattle location courtesy of a local recycling firm Total Reclaim. The new donated space is on Corgiat Drive just north of Boeing Field. Its first shipment from there will go to Ethiopia.

Clear Path shipped dozens of containers from Sutherland's donated warehouse space and is deeply grateful to him and his staff for accommodating a program that has made a difference to thousands of hospital patients worldwide.

Volunteers Are Clearing A Path

We cannot do our work without the incredible support from our volunteers. They include: Bob & Pam Fermanis, Bill Marler, Frank & Susan Cole, Dorothy Guzzman, Karen Fredrichs, Erin Fredrichs, Wendy Tyner, Anton Hafale, Jim Scott, Lori Trieu, Thuy Nguyen, Sary Math, Bujon Kuure, Don Van Nimwegen, Wolfgang Brolley, Jane Watson, Keith & Lucia Ryan, Virginia Davidson, Sam El, Rick Lent, Tom Lent, Haris Wolfgang, Michael Bryant Brown, Ed & Sandy Schubach, Linda Owens, Kayla Black, Van Lai, Teddy Siriboon, Khue Dang, Brent Olsen, Howard Hanners, Joanne Ellis, Rainier Matthee. Special thanks to Kevin Sutherland, Shirley Gremyachev, Leigh Kerr, Lisa Evans, Brian Hafner, Ann Strickland, Johnnie Reed, Michael Wisnom, Rifka Several, Greg Atkinson, Cezanne Allen, Sally Heinz, Linda Owens, Molly Jester, Pat Roe, Lobke Dijkstra, Mike & Jenny Roben, Arden Norvold, Chris Oechsli, Andy & Guy Houser, Ngoc Vu, Ratanna Noeun, Greg Moore, Kim McCall, Karen West & Mike Spence, John & Andrea Adams, Tom Robbins, David Guterson, Jonathan Raban, John Marshall, Margaret Conner, Karen Matthee, Cher Vrieling, Sherry Larson-Holmes and Terri Hathaway.

Amputee Cyclist to Trek Around the World for Clear Path

Dan Sheret

Veteran amputee distance cyclist Dan Sheret of Wilmington, North Carolina, plans to trek around the world starting in the United States this summer to raise awareness and funds for the work of Clear Path International (www.abilitytrek.org).

Clear Path will be one of two charities to receive contributions from sponsors of Sheret's ambitious world tour that will take him by several projects assisting landmine accident survivors. He plans to stop and visit CPI beneficiaries in Vietnam, Cambodia and along the Thai-Burma border.

The other charity receiving funds is the Rotary Club of Montgomery Village, Maryland, for its Basra Prosthetics Project in Amman, Jordan, in collaboration with Physicians for Peace (www.mvrotary.org)

In 2003, Sheret made a 3,800-mile trek across the United States from San Francisco to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to raise money for the Barr Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to helping amputees worldwide.

This year, Dan's trek will start in San Francisco and end in Washington, D.C, before moving on to Europe, the Middle East, Russia, China and Southeast Asia. His trek will cover 16,000 miles and four continents.

Please Send Donations to:

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