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Clear Path International

Founded in 2000, Clear Path International is a nonprofit organization that serves persons affected by landmines or other explosive remnants of war and who are disabled or displaced by armed conflict. Although first established in central Vietnam, the organization is based on Bainbridge Island in Washington (U.S.). CPI now provides victim assistance, mine-risk education and capacity-building programming to Afghanistan, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (also known as Burma), Thailand and Vietnam in order to “restore the dignity and self-sufficiency of conflict survivors.”¹



The organization’s success and operations can be attributed to its innovative program design. CPI relies on collaboration with qualified local partners to provide rehabilitation, accessibility and socioeconomic-reintegration programming. Using this approach, CPI and its partners have served nearly 100,000 beneficiaries.¹ The organization relies on generous donations from individual donors, foundations, organizations and its primary sponsor, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).²

Vietnam

CPI began work in 2000 on a clearance project in Vietnam near the country’s former Demilitarized Zone.³ This project enabled the organization to branch out to nearby neighborhoods through victim-assistance programs that provided emergency medical and prosthetic care.³ Since then, CPI has delivered services to more than 7,000 landmine and unexploded-ordnance survivors in 16 provinces. and has sponsored the building of an elementary school after clearing more than 500 pieces of UXO from 110 acres (445,151 square meters) of land.¹ For its accomplishments in Vietnam, CPI has been awarded Certificates of Merit by Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces and from the Paralympics Association. In the United States, CPI’s work in Vietnam has been recognized on the floor of the U.S. Senate by Senator Patrick Leahy.

In Vietnam’s central provinces, CPI covers all hospital expenses for accident survivors and provides two-way transportation and per diem during the patient’s treatment period. Upon completion of these treatments, CPI invites survivors to participate in social-reintegration trips. CPI also provides bereavement grants to help the families of those killed by UXO deal with their immediate expenses.⁴ Similarly, the organization awards scholarship grants based on

family conditions. CPI is implementing the second phase of its Accident Survivor Assistant Project in Hai Lang district of Quang Tri province, where it has awarded 173 home grants and 156 scholarship grants to 173 UXO-affected families in seven communes. In Phong Dien district of Thua Thien Hue province, CPI has assisted 170 UXO-affected families in four communes, awarding 170 home grants and 148 scholarships. In Quang Trach district of Quang Binh province, CPI is assisting 94 UXO-affected families from five communes with 80 home grants and 57 scholarships. With the Quang Tri provincial Women's Union as an implementing partner, CPI is also implementing a microcredit loan program in Gio Linh district; 40 households are participating.⁴



Support from CPI provides prosthetics in Vietnam
Photo courtesy of CPI.

Cambodia

Since 2006, CPI has collaborated with Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development and established the Phum Seams Farmers' Cooperative and Rice Mills. These provided landmine/ERW survivors from three districts in Battambang province with socioeconomic and agricultural support.¹ In 2010, CPI and Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development partnered again to create the Kamrieng Micro-Credit Loan Program that offers affordable loans to roughly 250 families needing access to capital-for-plant startups, agricultural support and farm equipment.¹ Moreover, CPI teaches sustainable farming practices as part of the vocational training offered to survivors.

Afghanistan

Since 2007, CPI has provided victim assistance in Afghanistan and manages 31 victim assistance-related projects that affect more than 100,000 beneficiaries across 21 provinces.¹ The CPI Kabul office partners with PM/WRA, collaborates with on-the-ground implementing partners and provides assistance to landmine survivors and other people with disabilities by providing physical accessibility ramps to clinics, schools, government buildings and mosques, which are often the most important sites in communities across the country. CPI supports disability resource centers that develop vocational skills and access peer support and assistance from disability advocates, none of which would otherwise be available to the beneficiaries there. CPI has also expanded access to physical therapy rehabilitation services and physical rehabilitation.

One of the most requested project activities in this extremely deprived environment is livelihood training, which promotes economic reintegration of accident survivors. CPI supports these activities as well and always includes literacy and numeracy education as a component. CPI sponsors a first-rate cricket team comprised entirely of landmine survivors and young men with other physical disabilities. They routinely play against and beat teams of entirely able-bodied competitors. CPI works with 15 Afghan partners in 21 of the 34 provinces across the country. A few of CPI's implementing partners are highlighted below:

Afghan SPARK employs disabled deminers and landmine survivors to produce the equipment necessary for active deminers to conduct their work with increased safety. Revenue generated from demining-tool sales directly supports other victim-assistance projects. SPARK products are locally available and often cost significantly less than those sold by other suppliers, which are generally sourced from outside Afghanistan.

Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization partners with CPI to provide accessibility ramps, social-reintegration services and awareness-raising projects for disabled persons. ALSO's mission statement is "To promote living situations of persons with disabilities by providing peer support and psychosocial support, education, economic inclusion and rehabilitation services; to promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities by advocating the Afghan decision-makers to implement the victim-assistance provisions" of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, or APMBBC) and domestic laws and policies; and to ratify and implement the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and *Convention on Cluster Munitions*.

Afghan Disabled Vulnerable Society Cricket Team was created by CPI's partner, Afghan Disabled Vulnerable Society. ADVSCT provides sports activities for youth with physical challenges and changes public perceptions about the role of disabled persons in the community. Most of the players live in Jalalabad City, the bustling epicenter of the province near the Pakistan border. They consist of landmine survivors and young men who have contracted polio or suffered in other ways from war-related violence or disease and a lack of medical care.⁵

Since the program's inception, accessibility has been a key component of the CPI Afghanistan program. Funded by PM/WRA, CPI is committed to building high-quality ramps at key locations throughout the country to provide accessibility and raise "awareness of the rights of people with disabilities."⁶

Lao PDR

Beginning in 2010, CPI's involvement in Lao PDR revolved around survivor assistance resulting from UXO detonations. In collaboration with the Lao Women's Union, CPI offered low-interest loans through another microcredit program. This program provides female heads of household in the Pak and Poukoud districts with vocational-skills training, income-generation opportunities and facilitated reintegration.¹ For other work in Lao PDR, CPI also partners with the Laos Women's Union and the Laos Disabled Women's Development Center.

Myanmar

In Myanmar (Burma), CPI began a partnership with the United Methodist Committee on Relief in the early 2000s to provide microcredit loans, vocational-training workshops and emergency transportation to 835 women, men and children.⁷ Along the Thai-Burmese border, CPI supports a farming initiative that teaches landmine survivors and amputees skills in construction, animal husbandry and harvesting. Based in a small, rural village outside of Umphang, the initiative also provides the local community with food.⁸ While funding prosthetic programs in Thailand, CPI partnered with the Shan Health Committee and began socioeconomic-reintegration projects in Khun Kyaw, Loi Kaw Wan and Loi Tai Leng.¹ In the regions around the Thai-Burmese border, CPI partners with the Shan Health Committee and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare.

Conclusion

Now in its second decade of operation, CPI plans to build upon its mine-action experience to serve other areas of former conflict. With its focus on collaborative partnerships and under new direction by Executive Director Kiman Lucas, CPI serves landmine/ERW survivors in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. Through generous donations, support from PM/WRA, other grants and income from social ventures, the organization will continue growing local businesses and building the capacity of local nonprofit organizations that provide medical and prosthetic care, socioeconomic reintegration, agricultural support and accessibility to those in need. CPI has a worldwide staff of 70. CPI's involvement will continue growing and expanding in order to return "dignity and self-sufficiency" to conflict survivors everywhere.



~ Blake Williamson, CISR staff

Contact Information

James Hathaway
Co-Founder, Director of Communications
Clear Path International
P.O. Box 11114
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 / USA
Tel: 802 379 8427
Email: james@cpi.org
Website: <http://cpi.org>

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
Mine Action Information Center
James Madison University
Harrisonburg, Virginia / USA
Email: cisr@jmu.edu

Website: <http://cisr.jmu.edu>

Endnotes

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