

Project Renew's Prosthetics and Orthotics Mobile Outreach Program

Project RENEW established a mobile outreach program to provide prostheses, orthotics and education to explosive remnants of war survivors in the remote communities of Vietnam.

by Dang Quang Toan [Project RENEW]



Susan Eckey, Former Deputy Director General for Humanitarian Affairs, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visits with the P&O team.

Photo courtesy of Dang Quang Toan/Project RENEW.

According to a 2014 report compiled by Vietnam's Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Quang Tri province currently has 37,292 persons with disabilities, 13,023 of whom were disabled by Agent Orange and 5,094 by explosive remnants of war (ERW).^{1,2,3} Disabled persons living in rural areas often live in poverty and do not have access to basic services. For those with

injuries resulting from unexploded ordnance (UXO), prosthetics are difficult to obtain.

In 2008, Project RENEW implemented its Prosthetics and Orthotics (P&O) Mobile Outreach Program to assist persons with disabilities as well as those injured from Agent Orange. Quang Tri province has more than 613,000 residents; 71 percent of the total population lives in rural and mountainous



People with disabilities try prosthetics for the best fit and comfort. Adjustments to the prosthetics were made in Gio Son Commune, Gio Linh District, Quang Tri Province.

areas on both sides of the former demilitarized zone (DMZ).⁴ During the Vietnam-American War, Quang Tri was one of the most heavily bombed and shelled areas in the history of warfare with 83.8 percent of all land contaminated with UXO, landmines and cluster munitions.⁵ Since 1975, ERW accidents have caused 8,516 casualties (3,422 deaths).³ Quang Tri province was also heavily affected by Agent Orange during the Vietnam-American War.⁶ According to the Quang Tri Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin, Agent Orange/Dioxin has infected and caused disabilities in 15,485 people in the province.²

Project RENEW's P&O Mobile Outreach Program delivers rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities, spending an average of four days per month in the most remote and poorest communities. The team travels in a van equipped with tools and equipment necessary to conduct

on-site examinations to cast, fit and adjust custom prostheses, ensuring amputees and other mobility-impaired children and adults can function comfortably with basic quality and low-cost prostheses and assistive devices. The average price for a prosthesis is US\$280, the lowest price for the most basic prosthesis available in the region. Comparatively, the general price for a basic prosthetic leg is \$10,000 in developed countries.⁷

By August 2015, RENEW's P&O program examined about 1,000 ERW survivors who lost limbs in Quang Tri, providing them with artificial limbs and other assistive devices. For persons with disabilities, these prostheses restore dignity, self-reliance, productivity and the ability to contribute to society. Initially, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-founded this program, which is now supported by funding



A P&O team working trip to Huong Linh Commune, Huong Hoa District, Quang Tri Province.

from American veterans, private donors and the “Friends of Project RENEW” account. The program is unable to operate on a full-time basis, subject to availability of funds, with some discontinuation for the successful P&O operations due to funding termination. In addition, Project RENEW’s P&O program worked with the Quang Tri Department of Health to organize 27 training sessions on community-based rehabilitation for 540 P&O beneficiaries and local health staff to teach those with amputations about physical therapy, proper care of stumps and how to use prostheses for optimum mobility. The training aims to help participants network confidently, recommend follow-up support and special assistance, and inform Project RENEW staff when beneficiaries have problems with their prostheses.

Moving Forward

In addition to providing artificial limbs to ERW survivors and persons with disabilities, Project RENEW plans

to assist Quang Tri Provincial General Hospital in reactivating the Prosthetic Workshop, which could not provide P&O support to survivors over recent years due to lack of human resources. Project RENEW will accomplish this with funding donated to the “Friends of Project RENEW” account to send two new staff to the Prosthetic Workshop for 12 months of training from October 2015 to September 2016 at the Vietnamese Training Centre for Orthopedic Technologies School in Hanoi, the only school providing orthopedic training to technical staff throughout Vietnam. Upon completion of training, the rehabilitation facility will host three technicians to serve ERW survivors and persons with disabilities in need of prostheses and will serve as a logistic center for P&O operations in Quang Tri and neighboring provinces. ©

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