July 2007

Unsung Hero: Alison Bock

CISR JOURNAL

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The organization’s main goal is to create awareness about landmines and unexploded ordnance, and help victims all over the world. In the eyes of many people, Bock is truly an Unsung Hero.

by Matthew Voegel [Mine Action Information Center]

In today’s world, sometimes it seems intimidating to stand up and make a difference. That feeling was no different for Alinsky’s daughter, and President of the non-governmental organization Landmines Blow!, when she attended the summit on Mine Free World in Naosí, Korea in 2004. “When I walked into the summit, it was the first time I met real landmine survivors from everywhere,” says Bock. “I was overwhelmed at how many people needed help and wondered how I really make a difference by causing the problem so huge.” But in the mine-action community, this defeatist attitude is not an option. “Somehow, I thought of the landmine survivor from Cambodia who told me to focus on making a difference in the life of one person at a time. You can make a difference in one life, so I did it, and the rest, as they say, is history.”

Bock was selected as a Volvo Life Award semi-finalist from the state of Illinois because of her work to educate young Americans about the landmine crisis abroad and also because of her determination to help others in need. Stacy Davis of the U.S. State Department, who was select ed as a Volvo for Life Award semi-finalist from the state of Illinois because of her work to educate young Americans about the landmine crisis abroad and also because of her determination to help others in need. Stacy Davis of the U.S. State Department, who was select ed as a Volvo for Life Award semi-finalist from the state of Illinois because of her work to educate young Americans about the landmine crisis abroad and also because of her determination to help others in need.

Along with a different focus and approach, the organization’s name itself has turned heads and gained attention. “I have a nephew that was about 18 at the time and he read the word ‘blow’ to describe his relationship with his girlfriend,” reveals Bock. “I was in the middle of doing a research project for a cultural anthropology course on landmines, and I said out loud, ‘landmines, blow,’ because they really do. That became the name of my project and then my presentational and then my organization.”

Since the beginning, Bock and Landmines Blow! have pushed the organization to reach new heights. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members. Landmines Blow! now has over 1,000 members.

Along with ‘landmines, blow’ being a very catchy name, the organization’s first step in making clean water available for landmine survivors, refugees and others in Cambodia. In cooperation with the U.S Department of State, Landmines Blow! is currently in Phase One of the operation, which includes the construction of 10 wells that will provide safe, clean water to almost 1,800 villagers. “Landmines Blow! has made another one of its main objectives a reality,” states Bock. The organization’s main goals include raising awareness about landmines and unexploded ordnance, and helping victims all over the world. In the eyes of many people, Bock is truly an Unsung Hero.

Personal Sacrifice and Selflessness

Bock is no stranger to activism and helping others. Some of her work included being an expert for AIDSWalk Chicago for several years. Her team was able to raise over $200,000 for AIDS research. In addition, Bock has worked with Habitat for Humanity, Human Rights Watch, the American Cancer Society, the American Federation for AIDS Research and many others. Since Landmines Blow! is completely volunteer driven and non-profit, Bock also holds a full-time job. "I like my day job," says Bock, "but I believe that assisting landmine survivors and refugees is my purpose in life and it is not something I work to me. It is the most rewarding thing I have ever experienced in my life.

Bock does some of the most compelling and effective advocacy work in the mine-action world. In 2005, Bock was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, a chronic disease that affects the central nervous system. Despite the gravity of her medical condition, she kept working. "MS is a temporary setback, but it gave me a new eye on life, and a sense of urgency to get out there and do as much as possible while I have the ability," declares Bock. "None of us know what tomorrow will bring but we don't think that way when we are completely healthy. We take it for granted. I am a much stronger person mentally and more patient and empathetic. In fact, the day after Bock was diagnosed with the disease, she helped a young Croatian landmine victim and his brother from Zagreb to a music camp for the blind in New Orleans.

Conclusion

The future looks bright for Bock and Landmines Blow! New ideas and developments are circulating throughout the organization and creating a buzz in the mine-action world. "I think that mine action needs some new blood," remarks Bock. "I think that it needs people who are passionate about it to get out and talk. I think that it needs some new champions because it is still a significant problem." New programs are coming soon for the organization, including a new initiative called H20-Helping Others. Along with this new program, expanding the already successful Project Safe Water to other countries abroad is another goal for the near future. Bock also wants to make strides in assisting for women’s rights. "I'd really like to focus on the promotion of women in the communities that we serve," says Bock.

In the realm of mine action, Bock has had a great impact and still keeps contributing in such a spirited manner, others can’t help but admire her character. "Like her a lot personally, as well as professionally," states Davis. "She is diligent and anxious to follow the rules and regulations and provide the information and carry out the responsibilities and requirements of the grant. She’s very easy to work with." Her continuous work in the mine-action community is slowly making the world a little brighter for those whose world has been darkened by landmines and UXO. "The true heroes are the thousands of survivors out there trying to make ends meet," asserts Bock. "They don’t want handouts. They want the opportunity to support their families—basic things like food, shelter, clean water and an education. They want hope."