Over the past ten years, with funding from the U.S. Department of State, the Marshall Legacy Institute’s (MLI) Mine Victim’s Assistance Program (MVA) has helped over 800 male, female, and child landmine survivors in Yemen. MLI and our in-country program partner have worked to identify survivors and provide them with the assistance they require, including prosthetic services, vocational training, and self-employment opportunities, to improve their lives and increase their prospects for a brighter future.

Abeer Mabkhot is a thirty-year-old Yemeni landmine survivor. Ten years ago, she stepped on a landmine and lost her left leg. Abeer shares “I knew that the area had been contaminated by mines recently as a result of the war between Al Qaeda groups and the army, but because of the shortage of our fuel (gas, electricity, and diesel), I had to collect wood (fuel) for cooking. The mines were planted around a military camp, but the trees were also located in the same contaminated area. I was afraid of the mines, and this was the second time for me to collect wood from this area.” Abeer laughs, saying “the third time didn’t happen because I had my accident the second time.” Soldiers from the military camp heard the explosion and immediately took Abeer to the military hospital, but she lost her left leg.

Qasem Al Surabil is a young man living with his mother, father, wife, and children in Yemen. He works hard to support both his family and his parents. Qasem is also a landmine survivor. “I was going to work as usual in agriculture with my brother when I saw a strange object on the ground and I thought it is a game. My brother told me to ignore it, but I took it and started playing with it, then it exploded. My brother, with some villagers who heard the explosion, took me to the Revolution Hospital in Sana’a, and there my hand was amputated.” After his accident, Qasem searched for a job but employers did not want to hire him due to his disability. He took out a business loan, but still went into debt. “Unfortunately, because of the bad situation of Yemen, which increases every day, my small business failed with no return…I lost everything.”

Program Overview

As of 2017, the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor indicates 9,118 known casualties from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Yemen; however, there is no differentiation between those injured or killed. The cumulative figure of landmine survivors is undoubtedly much higher. Ongoing conflicts since March 2015 have likely added additional landmine and ERW contamination, and have hindered data collection of casualties, which has “prevented the operation of a national casualty surveillance mechanism.”

Wanting to help address the physical, vocational, and financial needs of landmine survivors in Yemen, MLI launched the MVA program in Yemen in 2011, with funding from the US Department of State. To date, MLI’s MVA Yemen program has provided prosthetic...
The joint MLI-YALS project provides the following:

1. Prosthetic services and other medical care to Yemeni landmine survivors, including both adults and children
2. Vocational training to enhance the employment opportunities and social integration of adult Yemeni landmine survivors
3. Self-employment opportunities for select graduates of the vocational training programs through competitive micro-grants

Medical Assistance: Providing Prosthetic Limbs

To provide medical assistance to Yemeni landmine survivors, MLI and YALS first identify survivors from governorates throughout Yemen that are under elected government control. YALS coordinators living in these governorates and districts collect information on survivors from local authorities, then meet the survivors in person to determine their needs and to create survivor profiles. The YALS coordinators send the profiles to the YALS central office and to MLI for review and the group then creates a plan of care. The survivors selected for medical assistance receive prosthetic limbs and other required rehabilitative care. The majority of survivors receive their support at prosthetic centers in Aden, Taiz, or Al Hudaydah, although there have been special arrangements made for certain survivors to be fitted and receive their new prosthetic limbs at home, as some are unable to travel comfortably and/or safely to the medical facilities. The program
previously used a prosthetic center located in Sana’a; however as the city is no longer under the control of the elected government of Yemen, the program no longer uses this facility.

Most of the survivors are from rural areas, so it is necessary to provide them with transportation to the prosthetic facility as well as accommodations. The fitting of a prosthetic limb occurs over a number of appointments before the final prosthetic product is finished and ready for wear. Transportation is provided from their villages to the prosthetic centers, and the accommodations selected are hotels in safe neighborhoods near the medical facility. At least one parent accompanies child landmine survivors receiving artificial limbs. YALS staff members are present to monitor and document the process, and to ensure that the survivor recipients are satisfied with their care. Since the program began in 2011, 386 men, women, and child landmine survivors have received medical care through MLI’s program.

The impact of the medical care, typically prosthetic limbs, is huge for the Yemeni survivor beneficiaries. MLI has observed, and YALS confirms, that landmine survivors with limited mobility face immense difficulties in their daily lives, particularly in rural areas where residents often must walk a long way to collect firewood, tend to animals, and perform daily chores. Children landmine survivors are often unable to attend school due to inaccessible buildings and also face stigmas surrounding their physical disabilities. The prosthetic limbs that MLI and YALS provide to the survivors are designed to be durable and low-tech, accounting for rough terrain and limited repair facilities and local technology. The vast majority of the survivor beneficiaries report a high level of satisfaction with their new limbs, as they report improved mobility and independence.

Vocational Training and Micro-Grants

Vocational training. Similar to medical assistance, the process of identifying landmine survivors desiring and needing vocational training begins in the governorates, where the YALS coordinators collect data, meet the survivors, and share their profiles with the in-country program manager, YALS, and MLI. Once MLI approves the selection of trainees, YALS arranges the vocational training courses, typically one course for women and one course for men each quarter. Coordination with local authorities is often required to ensure that MLI and YALS have permission to conduct the training and, at times, to allow survivors and YALS teams to travel from one governorate to another.

MLI’s MVA program has funded a variety of training topics throughout the years. The survivors themselves often suggest the vocational training subject, as they identify the skill they prefer and have the physical capacity to perform. The training topics have included beekeeping, carpentry, computer/typing skills, sewing, and weaving. All courses are offered to enhance employment and income generation opportunities and to assist survivors in their reintegration into society.

The training courses each take place five days a week over the course of one month. Participating survivors are provided transportation from their homes to the vocational facility, as well as accommodation in hotels near the vocational facility and a modest stipend. The training courses vary in size, with sewing classes having ten to fifteen students per class, and weaving classes usually having six to eight students per class. The training courses are segregated by gender due to cultural considerations and norms. Most of the vocational courses are held at rental facilities chosen based on their proximity to the survivor participants as well as the safety of the general area.

Sewing courses for women have proven to be quite successful. The majority of recent female survivors participating in these courses have been from Aden, Al Hudaydah, Lahij, and Taiz Governorates. Each graduate of the sewing course receives a sewing machine, fabric, and items such as thread, scissors, buttons etc., to take home upon course completion to employ their newly learned skills and provide support for their families. A sewing room has been created at the YALS Center to provide successful trainees with materials to produce items for barter or sale in their villages. The sewing room also gives participants the chance to sell their work from the Center.

A computer training lab with high-speed internet connectivity was established in 2011 at the YALS Center and equipped with state-of-the-art computers and software for selected survivors to receive instruction from a certified teacher. This computer training course was suspended in 2013 due to internet instability; however, it provided valuable training to survivor participants who continue to have access to computers. Labibah Abdo Saif is a thirty-one-year-old female landmine survivor who lost her right leg and right eye due to a landmine explosion at the age of nine. In 2013, Labibah received computer training through the MVA program. With her computer training, Labibah acquired a government job and also serves as a team leader in mine risk education (MRE) at YALS.

MLI has offered beekeeping, carpentry, and weaving courses to adult male landmine survivors. The carpentry participants built ramps for wheelchairs at many schools and homes of other survivor amputees, greatly improving access and mobility. Unfortunately, high lumber prices and scarcity of materials have limited the carpentry training course in recent years. Beekeeping also became difficult, as the course

Hend is a thirty-three-year-old Yemeni landmine survivor, married, and lives in a small village. In 2002, Hend was caring for her sheep near her village when she was injured by a mine explosion, losing both of her legs. Hend received medical assistance through MLI’s MVA Yemen program in 2013. She later successfully completed the training course and received a sewing machine, which she now uses to provide for her family. Hend says the monthly income derived from sewing helps cover her monthly rent.
providers and graduates frequently had to move their hives to new locations for security purposes. In recent years, vocational training in weaving has proven the most viable training course for men, and the loom work is a good fit for survivors who have lost a leg, as weaving allows them to work while sitting. Basheer Al Wesaby was injured by an anti-personnel mine while caring for his sheep. Basheer participated in the vocational training carpentry course, graduated, and went on to assist the course instructor in the next course iteration, helping new trainees understand the skills of the trade. He now has a carpentry job and makes an income that allows him to cover expenses for his wife and five children. Basheer also works with YALS’s MRE team.

**Micro-grants.** For the past three years, MLI and YALS have awarded ten competitive micro-grants annually to vocational training course graduates, enabling them to grow and expand their businesses in the fields of sewing, beekeeping, and mini-markets. Survivors who have previously completed a vocational training course are eligible to apply for a competitive micro-grant. Survivors submit their business plan to YALS, and a selection committee reviews all applicants and determines who is best qualified to receive funds to grow their business. One micro-grant recipient is Qaryah Mohammed Al Amry, a twenty-two-year-old female survivor who lost her right leg to a landmine explosion. Qaryah, who participated in the sewing course and received a micro-grant in 2019, says that “sewing for women is the best vocational job and the best social relationship. I have a lot of women customers. Last month, the income was between $200 and $250, but this month I expect my income will be double that because of the feast season.”

To date (2011–present), 436 adult male and adult female landmine survivors have participated in the MLI vocational training courses, and most participants have gone on to use their skills to earn a living, but there are additional, intangible benefits to the training as well. YALS coordinator Ahmed Alawi says, “the friendships made during training is one of the important things they do. They make good friendships and I know a lot of them stay in touch with one another and also with YALS staff after training.”

### Program Challenges

Providing medical assistance and vocational training to landmine survivors in rural areas is challenging, particularly at this time in Yemen’s history. The primary challenge is security. The ongoing conflict between government and Houthi forces has limited the geographic scope of the project, and the MLI and YALS team are working only in areas under government control. Nevertheless, security concerns remain, and the movement of landmine survivors to prosthetic centers and training centers requires careful consideration and planning. The program takes special care to not move survivors through dangerous roads or battle areas. When the YALS team and the local authorities determined that there would be a risk to move survivors, which occurred in the previous two quarters, MLI and YALS arranged to provide the prosthetics to survivors in their homes. While there was a risk to the YALS team and prosthetic technician to reach the survivors, the team developed safety procedures to minimize the danger of travelling through perilous areas.

The majority of survivor beneficiaries live in rural, mine-affected areas. MLI and YALS specifically have chosen to reach these survivors because very limited health services are available to this population. Arranging transportation, security aside, is challenging, and logistics can be difficult, but MLI and YALS feel strongly about reaching the populations that may otherwise be missed. Program implementers have found that detailed coordination with local officials is essential to facilitating the logistical and transportation requirements of survivor beneficiaries.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges in the implementation of programs, such as maintaining social distancing and promoting mask wearing. At the time of this writing, the World Heath Organization reports 7,625 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Yemen, with 1,438 deaths and 311,483 vaccinations administered to date. In 2020, MLI awarded micro-grants to two survivor graduates of the sewing course to create masks for fellow survivors and YALS staff and to distribute the masks throughout their communities. The team is adapting and taking the precautions necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19 while striving to meet program goals.
Conclusion

With the mountain of challenges present in Yemen today—war, famine, widespread poverty and disease, landmines, and now COVID-19—MLI and YALS have been able to provide prosthetic limbs, vocational training, and/or micro-grants to more than 800 male, female, and child landmine survivors. The overarching goal of the program is to improve the lives of Yemeni landmine survivors, particularly those living in rural, heavily-contaminated areas, and we are humbled to help survivors like Abeer, Qasem, and countless others to have opportunities for a better life. With ongoing support from the U.S. Department of State, MLI, in partnership with YALS, will continue the MVA program for Yemen for the next two years and looks forward to continuing this successful model to provide prosthetic, vocational, and income-generating support to Yemeni landmine survivors.

Tamara Klingsheim, who is the MLI Program Manager for Yemen, summarizes the program, saying that: "Working with MLI and overseeing the Yemen program for the past ten years has been a wonderful experience as I’ve seen so many lives being transformed...landmine survivors being given the opportunity to once again become productive citizens within their communities. These individuals, single, as well as, mothers and fathers, have been given hope, the tools, and the training to provide for themselves and their families."


Elise Becker
Vice President of Operations
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Elise Becker is the Vice President for Operations at the Marshall Legacy Institute, where she manages many of the organization’s major programs, including the Mine Detection Dog Partnership Program and Peacemakers and Problem Solvers Program. She has been in the mine action sector for over fourteen years, and previously served as the Frasure-Kruzel-Drew Fellow at the US Department of State. Becker earned her bachelor of arts from James Madison University and her master’s in public administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Tamara Klingsheim
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Tamara Klingsheim works out of her home in the Smokey Mountains near the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. Working with the Marshall Legacy Institute for the past eleven years, Klingsheim has had the opportunity to oversee the CHAMPS Program (Children Against Mines Program) and Mine Victims’ Assistance in several war-torn countries, to include Yemen. She connects school children across the United States and abroad in service-learning opportunities and works with in-country managers of mine-affected countries, helping survivors with both medical and vocational assistance.
Assisting Landmine Survivors in Yemen
By Elise Becker and Tamara Klingsheim [Marshall Legacy Institute]