



COPE Newsletter March 2016

COPE is...

The Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise. We are a local not for profit organisation that provides support to the Government of Laos' physical rehabilitation services throughout the country, focusing on prosthetics and orthotics (P&O) COPE also supports patients who come to the rehabilitation centers. COPE advocates for survivors of bomb accidents and people with disabilities in Laos.

FAST FACTS

35%

Of COPE-supported patients who were fitted with prosthetic devices are bomb survivors.

8,311

Visitors to the Visitor Center during the first quarter of 2016!

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COPE Special Mobile Clinic

Addressing barriers to accessing physical rehabilitation

Although COPE covers all of travel, food, accommodations and medical expenses to access physical rehabilitation services, difficult road conditions, family responsibilities, and trepidation about traveling far from the familiarity of home prevent many people with physical disabilities in Laos from seeking treatment at one of the four Provincial Rehabilitation Centers (PRC) operated by the Center for Medical Rehabilitation (CMR). Acknowledging the existence of these barriers, COPE and the Centre for Medical Rehabilitation (CMR) are piloting a Mobile Clinic Pilot Project, with generous support from the government of Canada.



Launch of COPE-CMR Mobile Clinic Project

COPE-CMR Mobile-Clinic Pilot project official launch took place on February 5th in the presence of Ms Lee-Anne Hermann, Charge d’Affaires of the Canadian Embassy in Vientiane. The first time a Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs came to Laos was in October 2013. His visit included a tour of COPE center in Vientiane. Upon his return to Ottawa, he announced Canada’s intention to support Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) survivors. “After three years, and with a lot of hard work from many people, this is becoming a reality” said Ms Hermann during her opening speech. After seeing a demonstration of the clinics in action, Ms Hermann joked “I am sure these vehicles will never again be as clean and shiny as they are now. And it is a good thing, because it will mean they are being used to reach the people who need rehabilitation services in remote areas of Laos.”



A team of three Cambodian Physiotherapist (PT), Prosthetist&Orthotist (P&O) and Bench Technician (BT) from the People With Disability Fund shared their wide experience of managing mobile clinics by training COPE and CMR teams, both in Vientiane and in the field.

First outreach camp in Xayabouli Province

COPE-CMR mobile-clinic teams stocked the new vehicles with dozens of pairs of elbow crutches, walker frames, and equipment for device repairs and casting before setting off on their inaugural trip to Xayaboury Province.

In just five days, the team conducted 140 consultations with people with various mobility disabilities, who lined up at the District Health Center in each of the four districts visited in Xayabouli Province to meet the Mobile Clinic team. In addition to advising on stump and device maintenance, and repairing the prosthesis/orthotic devices of existing patients, the teams conducted physiotherapy assessment and provided assistive devices.



They also took measurement and castings that will enable them, upon their return to the PRC, to

fabricate the prosthetic/orthotic devices needed by some patients. This will save a lot of time for the patients, who will only be invited to come to the PRC when their device is ready.

Foot Orthotics/Shoe Modifications



Crucial transportation and follow-up service

However, traveling to a Provincial Rehabilitation Centre (PRC) can be daunting for many patients. At the age of 40, Miss Chin Thongphut had never ventured beyond her home district of Peang. After being assessed by the Mobile Clinic team in Xayaboury, she was told COPE could provide her with a custom orthosis for her weak leg. She was worried when she learned that once her new orthosis was complete, she would have to travel to Luang Prabang PRC for the fitting and training. The thought of traveling alone, being away from her village and family, and staying in an unfamiliar place with strangers for the first time in her life was too much to bear. What helped her make up her mind was the fact that COPE sent a car and a member of its mobile team to pick her up, and arranged for patients from her district to travel together. By the time we met with her after she'd been at the PRC for about a week, Miss Chin was confident, happy, and optimistic about how her life would improve with her new

orthosis. She looks forward to wearing it so she can work harder in her vegetable garden. She hopes to be able to raise more vegetables that she can then sell in the market for profit.



Miss Chin

Mrs. Thongkhoun Nanthaxay, who is 23, has suffered with weakness on her right side since she was born. Walking and using her left hand is difficult. She has a one-year old daughter, so she needs to be at home to help with the childcare and family rice farming. She explained that she could never be away from her family long enough to travel to Vientiane for treatment.



The Mobile Clinic team met Mrs. Thongkhoun in Xayaboury Province and made a casting for her orthosis. She was only able to travel to the PRC in LuangPrabang for a fitting and training because she would be away from home for a short time. Mrs. Thongkhoun also talked about being very homesick, but she thinks her time away was worth it. She hopes that her new orthosis will help her walk faster and feel stronger. She wants to keep up with her family and friends instead of always having to walk behind them. She also wants to be stronger so she can work harder in her rice paddy and earn more money to help support her family.

COPE's support, and all are grateful that the services have made their lives a little bit easier.



Mr. PhethDamdong, age 26, lost his right leg in a landmine explosion in 2015 while foraging in the forest for food. After assessment and casting by the Mobile Clinic team in XayabouryProvince, Mr. Pheth traveled to the Provincial Rehabilitation Centre in LuangPrabang to be fitted for his first prostheses.

It's all about people's stories

As part of COPE's continuing efforts to better serve its patients, Mr. SoksaiSengvongkham, Operations Manager at the COPE Visitor Centre, and Sally Strasser, an American volunteer at COPE, traveled to LuangPrabang PRC to record the stories of landmine survivors and people who have become disabled through illness, other accidents, and congenital deformities. While each patient's story is unique, the daily struggles for disabled Lao people are wrenchingly similar.

They worry about being a burden to their families. They never know if they will have enough food to eat. They wonder how they will earn enough money to pay for school for their children. These are universal concerns for people in developing countries, but they are more acute for people with disabilities. None of these patients could have afforded treatment without

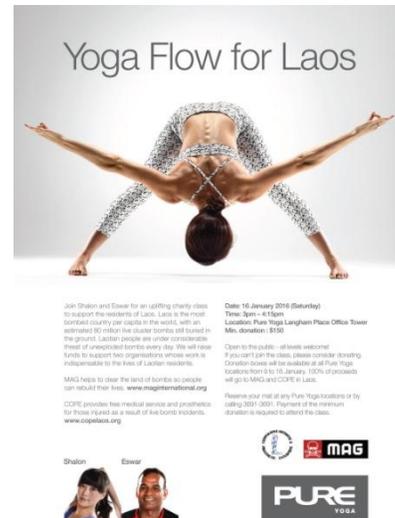
COPE Fundraisers



Hong Kong resident Dawnie Ng visited Laos in 2015 summer. Shocked by what she learnt about unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination and its terrible consequences on the population, Dawnie decided to help. She

convinced the managers of "Pure Yoga", who operate 7 centers in Honk-Hong, to organize a fundraising yoga workshop.

Dawnie's efforts, combined with yoga teachers Shalon Wan and EswarKhuntiagenerosity, helped raise nearly USD\$900, which have been split equally between COPE and MAG Laos.



Laila and Saskia



Inspired by COPE's work to support people with disabilities, including UXO survivors, Laila and Saskia, two 11-year old students from Vientiane International School, decided to raise fund by

selling handicrafts at their school fair. Through their hard work, they raised nearly \$50.

Thank you so much to Laila and Saskia and other generous people whose donations help ensuring the necessary support for people with disabilities in Laos.

COPE Staff

COPE Rehabilitation Manager.
Suresh Selvaraj

“Trained as a physiotherapist, I have 20 years of professional experience. In the past 11 years, I have worked exclusively as rehabilitation consultant and trainer in the humanitarian sector for institutions such as Motivation UK, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Handicap International, in Sri Lanka, Middle East and African countries. I am very happy to have the opportunity to use my experience to strengthen the core rehabilitation activities of COPE, in support of the Center for Medical Rehabilitation and Provincial Rehabilitation centers in Lao PDR.”

English Mentor for COPE Visitor Center Staff

Sally Strasser is an English teacher from Connecticut, USA. As part of the programme Princeton in Asia, Sally spent 3 months in Vientiane teaching English at the Vientiane College. She also volunteered twice a week for a few hours at COPE to help COPE Communications team at the Visitor Center, Soksai, Jack and Mee, interview patients and write their story. In March, Sally accompanied Soksai in Luang Prabang to interview patients from COPE’s first mobile clinic.



Thank you Sally for your enthusiasm and dedication to people with disabilities in Laos. We wish you all the best in your next adventure.

Many thanks to our supporters...



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And special thanks to all the individuals, visitors and local businesses who generously support us throughout the year!



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