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Helping Syrians stand tall again

NEWS

“I was walking and then all of a sudden I was up in the air,” recalls Mohamad, a 32-year-old father, of the moment he was injured in Syria. “I never heard the missile coming or the explosion.

“When the doctors saw my injuries they told me I would probably die. But this was not an option for me—I had to survive for my two-year-old son. The doctors managed to save my life, but my left leg had to be amputated. When we arrived in Lebanon, I was unable to move.”

Mohamad is counted among more than one million people injured in the Syrian conflict, now entering its fifth year. Tens of thousands of Syrians now require artificial limbs, braces, and long-term rehabilitation care.

Handicap International has deployed 600 staff to respond to the needs of people with injuries, disabilities, chronic conditions, and psychological trauma caught in the Syria crisis. The operation is the largest and most complex in Handicap International’s history.

In September 2014, Handicap International staff in Lebanon heard about Mohamad’s case and began providing him with physical therapy so that he could regain the strength and balance needed to wear an artificial leg.

“At every session, the impossible becomes possible,” says Mohamad. “When I was fitted with my prosthesis, my physical therapist Binan said ‘stand up.’ I said, ‘how?’ But she encouraged me, and then I did.”

Shortly thereafter, Mohamad took his first steps without the aid of crutches. “I felt like a little boy—I wanted to run,” says Mohamad. “The support I receive from Binan and the other Handicap International staff is absolutely crucial. They never treat me like I’m less of a person because of my injury, they simply act like I’m a person who needs a little help to get his independence back.”

Since the launch of operations in Jordan and Lebanon in 2012, Handicap International has continued to scale-up activities, expanding its response in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan. Thanks to our donors, teams have supplied aid to more than 360,000 people, and fitted more than 2,700 people with prostheses and orthoses.

Yet, for each success story like Mohamad’s, there are dozens more Syrians with serious injuries and disabilities who have not been reached.

“The situation inside Syria has worsened over the past year, both in terms of protecting civilians and access to humanitarian aid,” says Anne Héry, Handicap International’s advocacy director. “We need to do everything possible to ensure there’s an opening so that we can reduce the physical and psychological suffering of people living in Syria.”



Qusay, 12, had both of his legs amputated after suffering serious injuries in a bombing in Syria. Handicap International staff members fitted him with artificial legs, and are teaching him how to walk again.

Together we’ve helped
360,000
survivors
of the Syrian conflict



108,572 rehabilitation sessions performed



83,901 people taught how to spot and avoid dangerous weapons



41,446 mobility aids, including wheelchairs, distributed



12,617 people provided with psychosocial support



2,746 people fitted with prostheses and orthoses



Watch a video of Mohamad taking his first steps on the Handicap International website: <http://bit.ly/MohamadHI>

Risk education in Gaza



Handicap International is teaching people clearing rubble in Gaza how to spot, avoid, and report the estimated 7,000 explosive remnants of war left over from the conflict with Israel in the summer of 2014.

Such work is paramount, according to a new Handicap International report, “Bombs Under the Rubble,” which shows that almost half of the people interviewed in Gaza report feeling afraid on a daily basis due to the

presence of bombs. A total of 45% say they benefit from training about the risks posed by explosive remnants of war.

“Reconstruction work in Gaza can only begin once the rubble has been removed,” explains Guillaume Zerr, Handicap International’s Head of Mission in the Palestinian Territories. “This phase is very high risk... The local population is highly exposed, as they often undertake the removal work themselves.”



Handicap International has transported more than 1,500 people to Ebola treatment centers.

Note from the Executive Director



As a valued member of the Handicap International family, this issue of The Next Step should inspire you and demonstrate the remarkable impact of your generosity.

Together, we have brought strength and hope to more than 360,000 Syrian refugees caught up in this four-year-old emergency—Handicap International’s largest response in 33 years of action.

Yet, amid such an acute crisis in the Middle East, your generosity has allowed colleagues in the field to continue supporting and empowering people with disabilities in more than 55 other countries. It is heart-warming to celebrate the amazing strides made by children such as Sanu (page 3) in Nepal, and Kanha (below) in Cambodia.

As I begin my work as Executive Director of Handicap International U.S., I am inspired to know that we—and the people we support—have dedicated donors like you by our side.

Thank you for being a part of each of these rebuilt lives.

Jeff Meer
Executive Director
@Jeff_HIUS

Fighting the Ebola epidemic

Handicap International ensures access to treatment centers and information about disease prevention

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Despite an overall reduction in the number of Ebola cases in West Africa, Handicap International remains dedicated to helping end the epidemic. Since December 2014, the organization has operated a fleet of 30 ambulances to transport

people suffering from Ebola symptoms to treatment centers in Sierra Leone. Decontamination teams traveling with the ambulances disinfect the areas where the infected people are staying to protect their family members and friends from getting sick. More than 1,500 people have been able to access treatment

as a result of this service.

Staff also conduct awareness-raising campaigns that target people with special needs, including people with disabilities, people with HIV and AIDS, and children. These groups are often excluded from other campaigns because they cannot attend information sessions or

the information is provided in a format they cannot understand. Deaf people are particularly uniformed.

Once the epidemic ends, Handicap International plans to help communities that have experienced great hardship by providing psychological and social support.

Kanha: Trauma to triumph in Cambodia



THE BIG PICTURE

Age 6 →

Kanha was playing in her family’s courtyard when her father accidentally set off a bomb he thought was a harmless piece of scrap metal. The impact of the explosion killed him instantly and tore Kanha’s right leg to shreds. Kanha’s mother rushed her to the hospital, where her leg was amputated. A year after the accident, Kanha attended Handicap International’s orthopedic workshop in Kompong Cham, where staff gave her crutches and physical therapy, and fit her with an artificial leg.



← Age 12

Fitted with new prostheses as she grows, Kanha is able to keep up with other kids, and even climb mango trees. Because the nearest school to Kanha’s home is more than 12 miles away, Handicap International provided Kanha’s mother with a motorbike so that she can take Kanha to school every day.

See Kanha today, and hear her story in our newest video: <http://bit.ly/KanhaVideo>

Age 17 →

Now a young woman, Kanha continues to go to school and has many friends. She dreams of becoming a doctor. After overcoming the physical limitations of her injury and the psychological trauma of being wounded, anything seems possible. With ongoing support from donors, Kanha is still able to visit our workshop in Kompong Cham every six months to ensure her prosthesis is fitting properly.





Sanu walks through the streets of Kathmandu on her way to Handicap International's rehabilitation center.

Locked away for years, Nepalese girl tastes freedom



Like many people with disabilities in Nepal, Sanu was hidden at home without treatment until Handicap International found her and provided her with rehabilitation

BENEFICIARY STORY

Sanukanchi, 14, flips through the pages of her sketchbook and shyly shows the colorful flowers she has been drawing. She has pages and pages of artwork—drawing has been her sole pastime for years. Born in rural Nepal with a deformed right foot and missing her left leg, Sanukanchi spent much of her life locked inside her home, crawling on her hands and knees. Mocked and shunned by her community, Sanukanchi could not imagine that one day she might be more than a pariah.

Sanukanchi, or Sanu, was raised in a mountain village by poor, illiterate parents. She was born with a clubfoot, but her condition was never treated.

Things got worse when she was nine years old. “I was playing outside one day and cut my healthy left leg,” says Sanu. “My mother, who was widowed and had two other children to care for, didn’t have the money to take me to a doctor so the wound became infected. The infection festered and so eventually I went to the doctor. He said my leg needed to be cut off to save my life. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I was so incredibly sad.”

Sanu’s life changed drastically. Her deformed right foot prevented her from hopping on one leg, so it was impossible to walk with crutches. She had to drop out of school and stay home. “I could only crawl,” she remembers. “I made drawings to pass the time. In the beginning, I felt miserable because I couldn’t leave

the house. After a while, I didn’t want to go outside anymore. People made fun of me and the other children bullied me.”

In 2013, a Handicap International disability outreach worker discovered her. Working in Nepal for 15 years, Handicap International has provided more than 46,000 Nepalese people with disabilities with physical therapy, artificial limbs, assistive devices like wheelchairs, and other rehabilitation services.

The worker who found Sanu remembers being shocked by the girl’s condition: “I couldn’t believe what I saw. Sanu was on the floor, too afraid to even look at me.”

She brought Sanu to Kathmandu for surgery so she could receive a artificial leg for her left leg. She was also given a brace to help her walk with her right leg.

Today, after years of struggle, Sanu is finally able to stand up straight and walk. She goes to school and is proud of it, even though her classmates are much younger than she is. She still needs physical therapy on a regular basis, and so remains in Kathmandu. She lives with 15 other girls with disabilities in a home managed by the local NGO, Voice of Creative Disabled Nepal. “I’m comfortable here because no one makes fun of me,” says Sanu. “Of course I miss my mom, but we both know I need the rehabilitation. My mother is so proud of me.”

Three months ago, Sanu went to her village to visit her family. “Everyone was stunned to see me walking,” says Sanu. “They couldn’t

believe their eyes. That moment gave me the boost I needed—I realized that I could achieve something in life and I suddenly felt very strong.”



Since then, Sanu has been working harder than ever at her rehabilitation exercises. Her next goal: to walk long distances without crutches. Meanwhile, she’s still drawing. On the final page of her sketchbook, there’s a portrait of herself and her best friend—a girl who lives with her and uses a wheelchair. The drawing shows them both walking and posing like movie stars. “This is my dream,” she says. “Sometimes I feel sad about what happened to me. But I know how far I’ve come. And when I look in the mirror, I’m very proud of myself.

This vital work is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

We travel village to village to find those who need care



Pushpak Newar
Rehabilitation
Technical Manager



Raju Palanchoke
Rehabilitation
Project Manager

Fifteen percent of Nepal’s population has a disability and more than one-third of these people have physical disabilities. Especially in rural, poor areas of Nepal, people with physical disabilities often find themselves confined indoors, unable to go to school and work, or seek medical care.

Handicap International teams travel from village to village in Nepal’s mountainous districts, often on foot, to identify the people most in need of help. We also use the media—radio, television, and newspapers—to get the word out about our rehabilitation services.

At our rehabilitation centers, as well as at partner hospitals and clinics, we provide people with disabilities with physical therapy and mobility devices like prostheses, crutches, and wheelchairs. We also send community rehabilitation staff to more remote areas to perform physical therapy with beneficiaries in their homes.

Background

Geography

Nepal is a landlocked country located in South Asia. It is situated in the Himalayas and is home to eight of the world’s ten tallest mountains, including Mount Everest. Nepal is bordered to the north by China, and to the south, east, and west by India. Its capital city is Kathmandu.

History

Although Nepal ratified the UN Disability Treaty (CRPD) in 2010, inclusion and accessibility remain huge national issues that are seldom addressed. Frequent natural disasters like earthquakes and a high prevalence of road accidents and chronic diseases contribute to the number of people with disabilities. Only 1% of people with disabilities have access to employment and roughly 78% of children with disabilities are out of school. Handicap International has worked in Nepal since 2000, and currently employs 53 field staff there.

Our results in Nepal (2005-2014)

45,937 people received physical therapy

195,271 rehabilitation sessions performed

13,525 prostheses and orthoses fabricated

8,086 mobility devices such as wheelchairs distributed

1,362 people received corrective or reconstructive surgery

From Navy pilot to peace-maker

DONOR REFLECTION

Patrick Wheary, a retired U.S. Navy pilot who flew during the Vietnam War, became a Handicap International donor after learning about our demining work in Laos. In the reflection below, he explains his incredible connection to Laos, and why he is dedicated to helping rid the country of deadly cluster bombs.

In 1969, I was a 26-year-old United States Navy pilot flying a single engine-jet fighter attack aircraft, the A-7 Corsair II, off the USS Enterprise during the Vietnam War. My fellow Navy aviators and I loved flying, and an assignment to an aircraft carrier required extremely high aviation skills. We regarded our assignments as an honor, although we faced difficult and dangerous missions 24/7. We were highly trained and focused. Flying was our life.

Our missions took us over South and North Vietnam, and sometimes over Laos. Our mission was to intercept North Vietnamese regular Army forces and transports advancing to South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. These forces were attacking U.S. and Army of the Republic of Vietnam personnel in the South.

Onboard the aircraft carrier, we were introduced to a new type of weapon known as a cluster bomb. Unlike other bombs, cluster bombs are filled with smaller bomblets that disperse over a wide area. I assumed at the time that if they didn't find a target, the bomblets would disarm or self-destruct after a few weeks. At



Patrick Wheary holds a model A-7 Corsair II, the plane he flew during the Vietnam War.

age 26, facing death on a daily basis, I didn't have much reason to consider the potential long-term impact of these weapons. Perhaps I was naïve.

It wasn't until much later that I learned about the long-term persistence of cluster bombs. They don't all explode on impact, and they may last for decades.

Unfortunately, there are still millions of them left in Laos. Today, totally innocent people, just walking through the jungle, may lose an arm or a leg—even their lives—to a cluster bomb. And they do.

Recently, I returned to Vietnam and Laos as a volunteer teacher. The people I met literally wrapped their arms around me as a new friend—they did not see me as a former enemy. But the evidence of war was still very present. I met about a dozen people in Laos who had lost limbs after stepping on cluster bombs and they were indeed struggling.

Back home, my good friend Lynn Bradach, who serves as a Handicap International "Ban Advocate," encouraged me to finally speak out

and raise awareness about the bombs we left in Laos, and do something for injured Laotians. Lynn lost her son, Travis, a U.S. Marine, to a cluster bomb accident in Iraq in 2003. This connection led me to join Lynn in her efforts to ban cluster bombs.

She's also the reason I became a Handicap International donor. Through her, I learned that Handicap International has worked to help victims and clear cluster bombs in Laos since 1983. The organization also supports advocates like Lynn who speak out against cluster bombs and argue for a universal ban on the weapon.

Since 2006, Handicap International donors have supported the clearance of 2.4 million square meters of land in Laos and the destruction of 17,000 bombs. There's still a long way to go, but I'm hopeful that donors and advocates like Lynn, myself, and you can finally bring the people of Laos the peace that they deserve.

Join Us.

Handicap International's website has the most up-to-date news, plus photos and videos of the people your donations help. www.handicap-international.us

Sign up for regular newsletters: www.handicap-international.us/updates

Follow your impact:

- Facebook: HandicapInternationalUnitedStates
- Twitter: HI_UnitedStates
- Youtube: HandicapInternationalUS

We'd love to hear from you. reachout@handicap-international.us

Thank you & Kudos!

Remember Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown from our last issue? She raised more than \$4,000 for our mine action programs this past holiday season using our holiday tribute cards. We are so grateful for her efforts to raise funds and awareness at her church's alternative gift market and throughout her community. Thanks, Rev. Joyce, for helping us create a mine-free world!



GIVE MONTHLY, BE A FIRST RESPONDER

A gift of **\$5 or more each month** will make you a hero to people like Najah.

After Najah was paralyzed by a bullet, Handicap International provided her with physical therapy sessions and a wheelchair so she can better care for her daughter Rawaa. As a **FIRST RESPONDER** your gifts will go to work immediately so refugees like Najah can live life to the fullest.



Donate online: www.handicap-international.us/monthly_donations
 Donate by phone: (301) 891-2138 CFC #: 51472

Monthly gifts are not designated. They will be used where the need is greatest.

Your DOLLARS at work

- \$5 A MONTH** provides a family with jackets and blankets to stay warm in winter.
- \$10 A MONTH** provides a refugee family with a kit of everyday necessities.
- \$50 A MONTH** provides a family with an accessible home.
- \$100 A MONTH** provides medical equipment for an emergency rehabilitation center.