

RECYCLED FOR REHAB

In the third part of our Gymtopia series, Ray Algar reports on a Gymkit initiative to send refurbished equipment to rehabilitation centres in Laos

Laos is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, bordering Vietnam and Thailand, with an estimated population of 6.5 million. During the Vietnam War of 1955–1975, millions of cluster bombs were dropped on the country, many of which failed to detonate. Tens of thousands of people have been injured or killed as a result of unexploded bombs; most victims are children and men. (Source: COPE charity)

Bomb survivors often lose limbs and must undergo many months of intensive rehabilitation – a vital part of the recovery process, supporting the great work undertaken by the surgical teams. However, rehabilitation centres in Laos often cannot afford treadmills or cycles, which are critical in helping people adjust to life with a prosthetic limb.

Gymkit UK – which for 13 years has been in the business of refurbishing and re-selling pre-owned fitness equipment and giving it a second lease of life – collaborated with Medical Aid International (MAI) and the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE), donating desperately needed treadmills and exercise bikes.

How did the project start?

Howard Braband, MD of Gymkit UK, took a call from Tim Beacon, who operates UK-based social enterprise Medical Aid International. Beacon urgently needed fitness equipment to re-equip five treatment and rehabilitation centres in Laos, working closely with COPE – a Laos-based non-profit organisation that provides comprehensive rehabilitation services for cluster bomb survivors.

Braband was only too happy to say yes. He explains: “We’re in the privileged position to be able to give something back, and when we saw the



Many rehab centres in Laos are dealing with bomb survivors

Gymtopia – a place where clubs do social good

Gymtopia was conceived by founder and chief engagement officer Ray Algar (right), who believes the global health and fitness industry has enormous influence and potential to do good in the world, beyond its immediate customers. The idea of Gymtopia is simple: to curate and spread remarkable stories in which the fitness industry uses its influence to reach out and support an external community in need. It was created with the generous support of various UK and overseas individuals and organisations.

Read more stories and submit your own: www.Gymtopia.org



great job Tim was doing to support the rehabilitation programme in Laos, with virtually no money, we felt it was only right to do what we could to help him.”

Project logistics

Gymkit UK donated three Life Fitness 9500 treadmills and four Star Trac 4300 bikes, including spare parts, to Medical Aid International, which flew the equipment to Laos. COPE then organised delivery and installation into rehabilitation centres.

Results

The donation meant that five rehabilitation centres were able to replace their broken exercise machines. Beacon is full of admiration for Gymkit UK’s act of generosity: “The quality is superb and the effort Gymkit made to ensure the machines were just right for the environment was amazing. We’re all so grateful for their support. It’s so encouraging and inspirational to know that there are companies out there willing to help like this. They are very special people.”

Where does your ‘end of life’ equipment go?

Imagine the impact your old machines could have at a rehab centre somewhere in the world. The next time you upgrade to new equipment, insist one of those old machines is donated to a charity like MAI. Its value may be low to you, but it could be priceless to others. ●

IN A NUTSHELL

Project by: Gymkit UK

– www.gymkituk.com

Location: Laos, Southeast Asia

Start date: December 2011

Project status: Ended

Impact: National

Donation: Life Fitness treadmills and Star Trac cycles

Gymtopia keywords: Disaster response, Health & Wellbeing, Helping Children

Charities supported:

Medical Aid International, Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise