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# Landmine Survivors Network Victim Assistance Programs

The Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) assists victims through the support of other landmine survivors. A number of programs and networks are available for coping and reintegrating survivors and their families back into their communities.

by Whitney Tolliver, MAIC

In 1995, two American landmine survivors, Jerry White and Ken Rutherford, founded LSN. Their mission and that of LSN is to "empower individuals, families and communities affected by landmines to recover from trauma, fulfill their rights and reclaim their lives."<sup>1</sup> The organization conducts programs in which landmine survivors assist other survivors. Since LSN's establishment as an international non-profit organization in 1997, it has been able to link landmine victims to healthcare, rehabilitation and peer support programs as well as continue its advocacy work to ban landmines.

LSN provides a number of services and programs for landmine victims across the globe. These include peer support networks, sitting volleyball teams, trauma recovery research, the "Raising the Voices" program, "Surviving Limb Loss" pamphlets and a rehabilitation database.

## Peer Support Networks

Since landmine survivors have personal experience dealing with the emotions and hardships that accompany limb loss, the Amputee Peer Support Networks have been at the foundation of LSN victim assistance. The LSN Peer Support Network has been established to arrange for amputee survivors to meet with other amputees through hospital and home visits. Survivors provide psychological and social support for victims and their families in order to cope with limb loss. The staff also assesses the liv-

ing conditions of mine-affected communities and identifies the special services, information and rehabilitative care they require. The first Amputee Peer Support Network by LSN started in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997 during a visit with Princess Diana. The project was so successful that it has been added to five other mine-affected countries: El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan and Mozambique.

## Sitting Volleyball Teams

One avenue of a victim's rehabilitation process can include his/her participation on a sports team. Sitting volleyball is one such option available for amputees. Through the sport, victims are able to strengthen themselves physically, boost their self-esteem and become part of a team. LSN has supported a number of sitting volleyball teams in Bosnia and Herzegovina with equipment and funds to participate in international competitions. In 2000, LSN was able to send a team from Sarajevo to the European Sitting Volleyball Championship in Germany to win first place. They also raised enough support to send the National Sitting Volleyball team to the Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia. LSN and other donors continue to work to build gymnasiums for the teams as well as provide equipment and uniforms.

## Trauma Recovery Research

When people become victims of

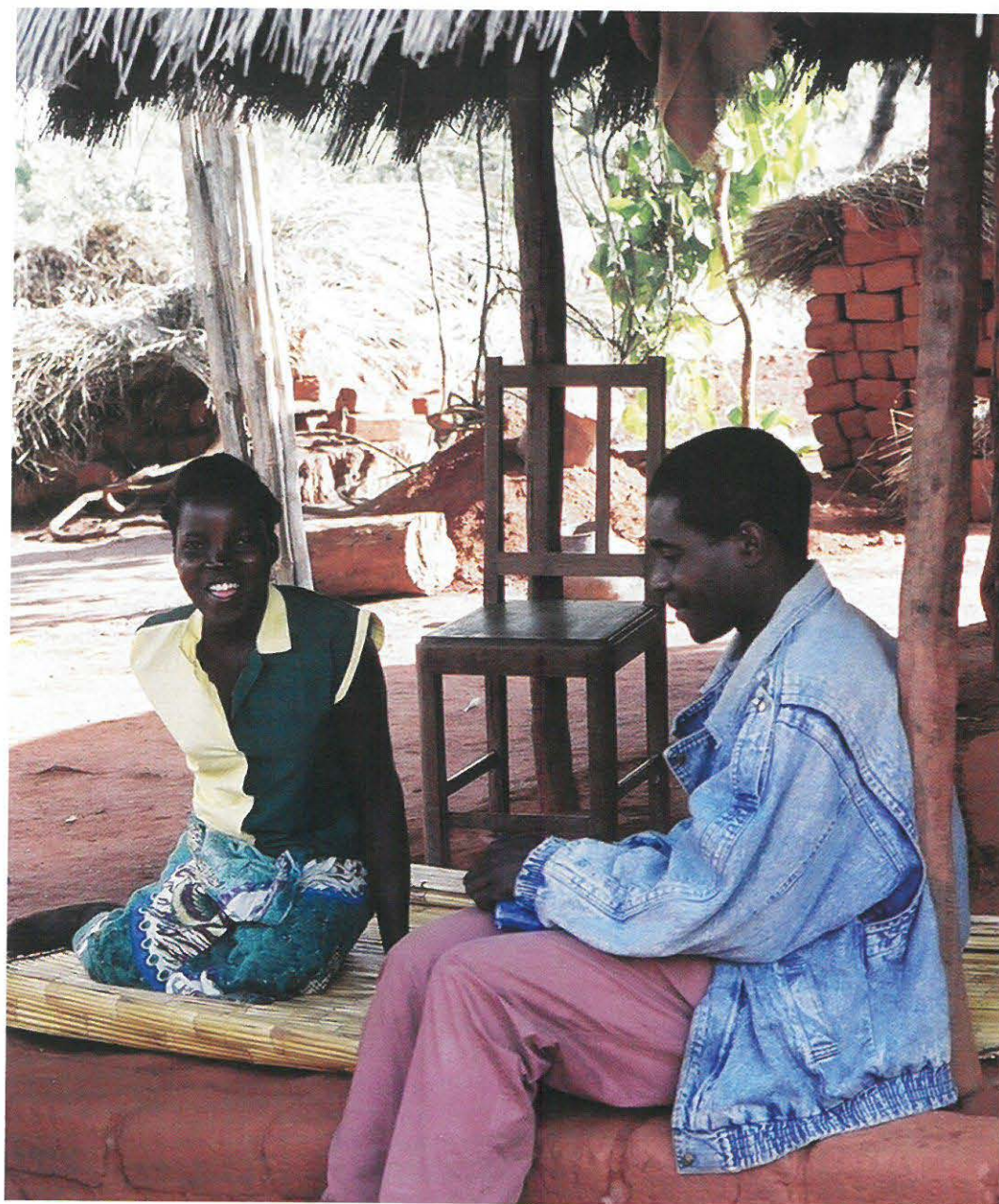
landmines, they are faced with an abrupt psychological and physical change. Some victims are able to cope with the trauma this change presents through normal coping processes. Others, however, may have more difficulty adjusting. The LSN peer support teams offer assistance to other landmine victims primarily by relating to their own experiences. Since victims do not all respond and recover from trauma in the same manner, though, LSN engages in a Trauma Recovery Research program in order to determine what factors and coping strategies will work best for victims in different societies. Through this research, they are then able to incorporate and adapt each peer support program to better fit the needs of its landmine victims.

Psychologists from the Trauma Recovery Research program study the factors involved in different individuals' responses to trauma in order to develop more appropriate coping measures. The research is conducted in two phases: 1) a qualitative study based on open-ended interviews with landmine survivors, amputees, family members and service providers, and 2) a quantitative study designed from categories and findings from the qualitative study.<sup>2</sup>

The qualitative study conducted during the first phase of the research design focuses on six different variables. These variables are investigated to determine if they have any significance to landmine survivors' recovery or if any other cultural factors are involved. Landmine victims and amputees are asked a series of open-ended interview questions by the trained LSN staff. Respondents are encouraged to describe events surrounding the incident, the loss of their limb as well as how they cope with the stress, trauma, and their recovery.



Peer support in Mozambique. c/o LSN



ery and reintegration into society. This approach to data collection is useful because it allows researchers to look into the participants' experiences in greater depth since each individual was allowed to share his/her experience in his/her own words.

Data from the trauma recovery research was collected from 91 people in seven different countries: 11 in Bosnia, five in El Salvador, 10 in Eritrea, 10 in Ethiopia, nine in Jordan, 15 in Mozambique, and 31 in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Psychologists then interpret the data. They try to abstract any commonalities between the experiences of the vic-

tims to formulate basic categories. Eventually, the researchers hope to create constructs for seven different country-specific theories.

The second quantitative phase of the research design involves testing the theories developed during the first phase. LSN is working with mental health care providers and epidemiologists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to test to following hypotheses: 1) There are risk factors (which hinder recovery) and mitigating factors (which promote recovery) that can influence the survivors' response to the traumatic event of a landmine injury and its

psychological after effects, and 2) Peer support positively influences these factors and increases survivors' overall well-being.<sup>2</sup>

A series of questionnaires, distributed to a selected landmine survivor population, will evaluate the effectiveness of peer support groups in their efforts at rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The results of these studies will be submitted to peer-reviewed academic journals and later publicized for the international humanitarian aid and NGO community in order to help adapt amputee peer support programs around the globe.

### Raising the Voices

LSN, in cooperation with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), has developed a leadership training program called Raising the Voices. This program has been designed to incorporate survivors into the Mine Ban Treaty process specifically to "ensure their effective involvement in the expression of their needs and means developed to meet those needs."<sup>3</sup>

Raising the Voices trains survivors to effectively represent themselves and other persons with disabilities in front of experts, diplomats and decision-makers. Participants of the program attend meetings of the Intersessional Work Program of the Mine Ban Convention in Geneva, Switzerland and of the ICBL Standing Committee on Victim Assistance.

### "Surviving Limb Loss" Pamphlets

LSN has developed a website and produced a pamphlet called Surviving Limb Loss that is useful to any amputee. Rehabilitation professionals, with the input of amputees in seven different countries, created a series of guides covering several different topics:

- Amputation Surgery
- Pain After Amputation
- Wrapping Your Residual Limb
- Infection Prevention
- Emotions After Limb Loss
- Prosthetics
- Physical Rehabilitation
- Getting Back to Work
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Information for Families

Each guide is filled with positive mes-

sages and practical advice for amputees. The pamphlets are available in four languages (English, Bosnian, Portuguese and Spanish) and are accessible through the Surviving Limb Loss website at <http://www.survivinglimbloss.org>.

### Rehabilitation Database

The Rehabilitation Database links landmine survivors to the rehabilitation services and education they need in order to assist them with their disabilities. Developed with the help of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the database continually tracks the needs and situations of landmine victims. The Rehabilitation Database contains a number of links for information in the six mine-affected countries of El Salvador, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Mozambique. These links include:

- A country profile giving background information on the country and general statistics
- A landmine profile and a background of landmine use
- An update on the current situation
- A list of mine action work performed in the country
- A rehabilitation profile that provides information on in-country rehabilitation and care services available for victims
- A link to other references and websites
- A text report that gathers all of the information for each country and presents it in a text-only format

Along with these links, the rehabilitation database includes a service directory. This directory provides contact

information for local and international programs and funding partners as well as a list of program details, specifying the type of programs each organization handles and who is eligible for their services. The Rehabilitation Database can be accessed online at <http://www.lsnatabase.org/>.

### Conclusion

LSN conducts a number of valuable programs to connect landmine survivors to other survivors. Each program provides a unique opportunity for victims to cope and reintegrate themselves into their community. In the future, LSN plans to expand its network by establishing a Peer Support Network in Vietnam in 2003 as well as continually updating the country and victim databases. ■

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### Contact Information

Landmine Survivors Network  
1420 K St., NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Tel: +1-202-464-0007  
Fax: +1-202-464-0011  
E-mail: [lsn@landminesurvivors.org](mailto:lsn@landminesurvivors.org)