A MESSAGE FROM ONE OF TWO PSYCHOLOGISTS IN LAOS, DR. MANIVONE THIKEO:
MY LEGACIES OF WAR

Dr. Manivone Thikeo is one of only two clinical psychologists in Laos. With the support of a fellowship, she was able to pursue higher education in the United States and completed a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Rhode Island and a Master’s degree in International Public Health from Boston University. Today, Dr. Manivone works as a mental health consultant for World Education in Xieng Khouang province, one of Legacies’ partner organizations that receives U.S. funding from Legacies’ continuous education and advocacy work.

Dear Friends,

I accompanied the Legacies of War team during their last trip to Laos in May 2017. We visited with grieving families and survivors who suffered a dreadful cluster bomb accident just two months prior to our visit. Twelve people were injured and a girl was killed when she mistook the cluster bomb as a toy, which exploded in the middle of the village.

As a clinical psychologist at World Education, I provide medical and mental health support to UXO victims, such as those affected in this tragic accident. My work upholds Legacies of War’s three pillars: History, Healing, and Hope. As I examine patients, I first look at how traumatic events endured during the Secret War period have impacted the patient’s mental health. Second, I offer healing through counseling and medical treatment. Lastly, we focus on hope as the patient recovers from their physical and mental trauma and feels empowered to think of their own future steps. This transformation does not happen overnight but is a long-term process with ongoing treatment and attention.

I encountered the UXO issue while growing up as a child in the war zone, and again as I studied and worked in the United States. There, I had the opportunity to work with Southeast Asian refugees who suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as part of the war and refugee experience. Both communities, those living abroad and those living in Laos, have been deeply impacted by the same war that ended more than 40 years ago.

Driven by the testimony from both of these communities and the realization that there were very limited mental health services in Laos, I found my calling as a clinical psychologist. To this day, it is still very difficult to find mental health professionals knowledgeable of Lao language and culture with experience in helping people recover from the trauma and depression of war and its aftermath. As a Lao clinical psychologist, I use the skills and experience gathered abroad along with the wisdom found among these resilient communities in Laos. Together we create a space for healing that draws on the strengths of local traditions.
Oftentimes, mental health and mental illnesses are disregarded by the local community as a short-term phase and stigmatized. Too often intergenerational trauma and lack of mental health infrastructure go unaddressed in society. As a result, many Lao and other Southeast-Asians suffer from PTSD. The unaddressed trauma has a great impact on the community as it transmits from generation to generation - from older adults whose suffering remains untreated for decades to youth, who still live in fear of UXO surrounding their homes.

So, when working with UXO survivors in Laos, I do a lot of listening out of respect for the local culture and the dignity of each individual. We emphasize a patient-centered approach and draw on the knowledge present in the local community to help everyone affected to recover from the trauma.

My job is to make sure that psychological support and mental health services are provided as soon as possible after a UXO incident. I spend 10 days in Xieng Khouang every month providing follow-up treatment for UXO survivors and supervising mental health training for a team of seven medical doctors and nurses. These local teams serve UXO survivors and their families by coordinating hospital care for patients and covering medical bills.

One of my most memorable experiences was with a patient, Yei Yang, who suffered burns over 80% of his body due to a UXO incident. Because of the devastating impact on his body, he became severely depressed and isolated with a sense of hopelessness. The patient did not leave his house or attend any group therapy sessions. However, after receiving in-depth personal counseling and treatment for only three months, he proudly became a peer supporter and advocate, who now uses storytelling as a tool to warn children about playing with cluster bomblets and educate the public about the danger of UXO. Today, he has become an important voice and contributes to a safer Laos for generations to come.

We still have a long way to go as the UXO victim...
I was touched to learn about Legacies of War and its efforts on behalf of our work in Laos. Legacies is an important organization that helps to speak out for victims who cannot speak for themselves. Legacies' crucial advocacy work in Washington D.C. results in more funding for groups on the ground in the clearance and victim assistance fields. Without Legacies, more innocent children and adults would lose their lives in Laos every year.

Learn more about upcoming events here or contact info@legaciesofwar.org for more information. Please consider making a tax-deductible gift today of $5,000, $1,000, $500, or $100 to support Legacies of War. Help us make Laos safe for future generations - together, we can finish the job!

Thank you,

Dr. Manivone Thikeo

After you make your gift, will you share this appeal with 3 other people who might also be able to make a similar contribution?
"I was touched to learn about Legacies of War and its efforts on behalf of our work in Laos. Legacies is an important organization that helps to speak out for victims who cannot speak for themselves. Legacies' crucial advocacy work in Washington D.C. results in more funding for groups on the ground in the clearance and victim assistance fields. Without Legacies, more innocent children and adults would lose their lives in Laos every year."

- Dr. Manivone Thikeo

SAN DIEGO, CA (Aug 6-12)

Kids in your family? Join Legacies at this year's summer camp at the Lao Heritage Foundation, a non-profit preserving and promoting Lao culture through the arts. Every year, Legacies provides young children, ages 4-18, with a curriculum on the Secret War and UXO issue in Laos. Know history, know self! We just completed the summer camp in Washington, DC. Join us in San Diego, CA from August 6-12 (Legacies UXO Workshop August 8th). Register and volunteer [here](#).

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND (Sep 4-6)

This year marks the 7th anniversary of the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#) entry into force! The Convention is a groundbreaking agreement between 119 states to prohibit the use, production and stockpiling of cluster bombs and was adopted on May 30, 2008. Legacies is planning to join the Meeting of States Parties this year in Geneva.
Our Executive Director Channapha Khamvongsa will be the guest speaker this year at the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 227, a local non-profit which promotes and supports a full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans.

NEW YORK (Oct 4-April 22)
This fall, the New-York Historical Society presents the groundbreaking exhibition, The Vietnam War: 1945-1975 from October 4, 2017 to April 22, 2018. Legacies of War is honored to be part of the exhibit during Veterans Week. Take your family and come see our loaned pieces in the Laos section and join our talk in November!

LOTS OF PLACES
Legacies of War could come to your community in 2018!
This year, we already brought our educational programs across the U.S., including California, Minnesota, Tennessee, Oregon, Washington State, Rhode Island, Virginia, Massachusetts and many more! Stay tuned and check out our facebook page, twitter and website for details for next year. Interested in bringing a panel or the travel exhibit to your town? Contact us at info@legaciesofwar.org

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