



# Burma Children

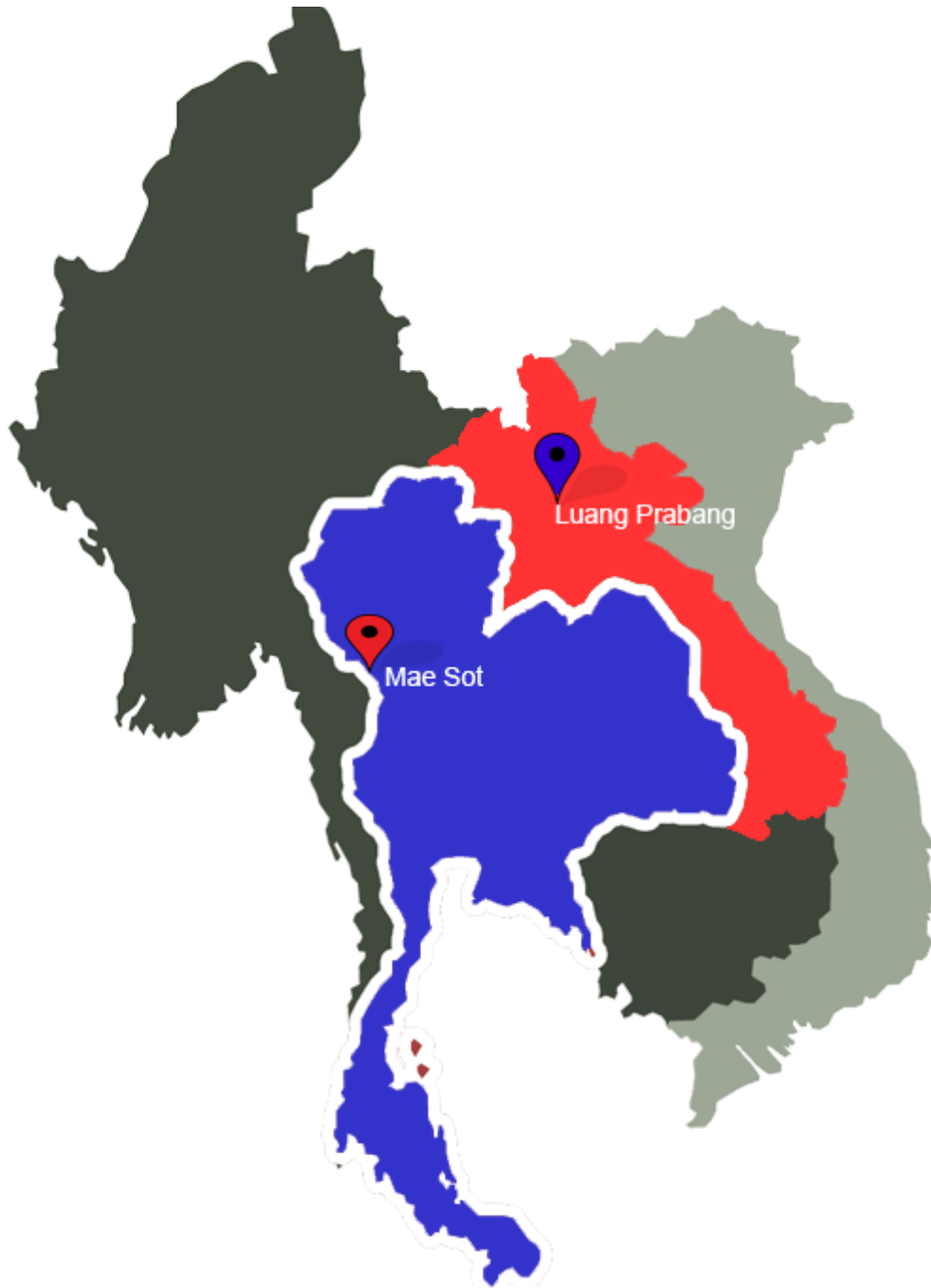
*Medical Fund* operating to give people a future



## Wheelchair Training and Fitting Project Report

28-30 March, 2018  
Luang Prabang, Laos

**Project Location:** Lao Friends Hospital for Children, Luang Prabang, Laos.



<b>Project title</b>	Wheelchair Training and Fitting Project Report.
<b>Project Location</b>	Lao Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC), Luang Prabang, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).
<b>Project Duration</b>	28-30 <sup>th</sup> March, 2018
<b>Project Aim</b>	Building capacity for international and local organizations to create awareness, and to distribute wheelchairs for children with disabilities.
<b>Project Beneficiaries</b>	Thirteen patients received assembled wheelchairs and many more will receive them through our partner organizations who attended the training.



## Introduction

Physical disability has been an increasing health impact amongst many illness. According to The World Bank, one billion people, or 15% of the world population experience some form of disability. Compare to the developed countries, the number of people with disability is higher in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Laos, a Southeast Asian country, is not an exceptional to this prevalence. Seeing disability as a big issue in the country, Laos Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) got in touch with Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF) for help.



## Mission

In early 2018, Laos Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) contacted BCMF through the help of *Save the Children Laos* and DAK Foundation. LFHC requested BCMF to provide wheelchair fitting training to their staff as they encountered with significant numbers of children with disability. Having four years of experiences of providing wheelchairs for children with disability in Thailand, Burma and Thai-Burma borders, BCMF is happy to expand our wheelchair projects to our new partner, LFHC, in Luang Prabang, Laos.

In March 26<sup>th</sup>, BCMF director Kanchana Thornton and three staff travelled to Laos and brought with them 15 wheelchairs for the training. Prior to the mission, LFHC also received 30 wheelchairs from BCMF.

The entire journey from Mae Sot to Laos took the team two days with really long immigration processes and tough travel on the last day. The team travelled by overland route. In fact, the road from Thai-Laos border to Luang Prabang was pretty risky as the road was very mountainous, under construction, covered with mist, and it was



*LFHC's truck taking 15 wheelchairs and BCMF team.*

dark by the time the team reached the mountain range. Spending hours on the mountain range, team BCMF arrived at LFHC about 10 p.m. Early the next morning, 28<sup>th</sup> March, will be the first day of *Wheelchair Fitting Training*.

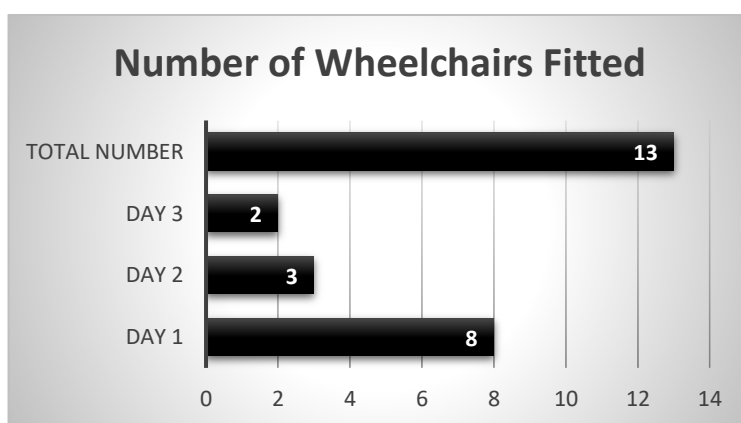
<sup>1</sup> The World Bank. 2018. *Disability Inclusion*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>. [Accessed 23 April 2018].

## The Three-day Wheelchair Fitting Training



*Team BCMF and the trainees posed for a group photograph in the first day of the wheelchair training.*

The first day of the training was kicked off by providing the attendants with some theoretical understanding of how wheelchairs work. Then, followed by the practical part when BCMF team demonstrated on how to measure the patients and assemble the wheelchairs. The training were attended by a total of fourteen attendants; six hospital staff from LFHC, five staff from ChildFund Laos, ADRA and Swiss Red Cross and three community health workers from a hospital in Maung Nan District of Laos. In the end of the day, together with the trainees, BCMF fitted eight wheelchairs. The next day, the trainees fitted another three wheelchair for the patients. In the last day, 30<sup>th</sup> March, BCMF team, together with LFHC's outreach team, travelled to two remote villages to deliver and assemble the wheelchairs for two ethnic Hmong and Khmu boys who live with disability. The journey to the two villages took the team 3.5 hour on a bumpy and dusty road.



## Patient Stories

**Pheng Lao** is a 17-year-old Hmong boy who lives in Phaklak village, Nonghet District of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos with his three siblings and their parents. He was born as a healthy child. When he turned seven months old, he had a severe fever which finally led to a seizure. Seizure after seizures, he developed muscle spasticity and rigidity which impaired his movements. When he turned 6 years old, he received a wheelchair from an organization. It helped him to go to school by pushing himself. At the age of 10, he finished grade three and stopped going to the school. However, he still takes home-school classes by having his mother, who is a schoolteacher, as a tutor. Now, Pheng is able to read and write Laos.



Additionally, he is now learning computer with a local organization called Childfund Laos. To attend wheelchair training and receive a new wheelchair, which becomes his second wheelchair, he travelled for *nine* hours to Luang Prabang.

He said, *“I want to learn how to fit and assemble the wheelchairs from this training so I attended it. In the future, I want to provide wheelchair to*

*other disabled children. At the same time, I want to make use of my computer skill by teaching them”.*

### **Pa and Jer**

Pa is a four-year-old girl and Jer is a two-year-old girl, and they are sisters. They were born from ethnic Hmong parents who live in a remote village in Nam Bak District of Luang Prabang Province, Laos. Pa, the older sister, was born with a stiff and short legs that stop her from walking. Two years later, Jer was born with medical condition known as Cerebral Palsy (CP) which impaired her from walking properly, but not as bad as her sister. The two sisters have been the patients of Laos Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) for physiotherapy for sometimes. However, their visits to the hospital is irregular due to the two-hour-long journey from their village. The two sisters were presented to BCMF by LFHC during the wheelchair mission and both received their first wheelchairs.



Their parents said, *“We are very happy to receive these wheelchairs for our daughters. We now can go out together with them to any places. Before, we have to carry them on our backs since one hardly walk and another one does not walk at all”*.

### Joy (the happy boy)

Joy is an 11-year-old ethnic Khmu boy, who was born healthy. However, when he grows up he lost his



ability to walk. He went to LFHC for physiotherapy sometimes, but he could not go often because the hospital is very far from his village. Currently to remain mobile, he crawls using his arms to pull himself forward. Joy was very excited when LFHC and BCMF's teams

were fitting wheelchair for him.

*“Before he received the wheelchair, he always had to stay home,”* said his aunt. *“Now he is so happy to receive the wheelchair and he can go outside with it”*.



### Lah (LFHC Physiotherapist)

Lah has been working as a physiotherapist for Laos Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) for many years. As a physiotherapist, he encounters with many children with disability. This was the first time for him to receive wheelchair training. He was actively engaging in this wheelchair mission.

*Lah said, “First of all, I would like to say “million thanks” to BCMF team for helping us. I was really happy when I heard about this wheelchair mission because we are in need of wheelchair skills. With the help of BCMF through training, we are now able to assemble wheelchair for our patients. I am pretty sure that many patients will come for help in the near future. It has been a great cooperation between BCMF and LFHC and we are looking forward to work together more in the future”*.



## **Conclusion**

The lack of healthcare in lower-income country like Laos has a huge negative impact on the population. Out of many people who need medical helps, people with disability tend to be the most vulnerable ones as they are isolated and housebound. Most of the time, these people were marginalized and objected to economic and education opportunities. As a result, many ended up staying home or not bothering themselves seeking treatments. The organization like LFHC sees the needs of people with disability and steps in to help them.



## **Acknowledgements**

This first wheelchair mission in a neighboring country, Laos, is initially involved a few partner organizations. Save the Children Laos and DAK Foundation were the ones who initiated this mission as Laos Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) requested. Behind the mission, there are key partner organizations like the Rotary Club of Wanneroo, Wheelchair for Kids, Krio Hirundo Onlus, Allied Pickfords and Suvannimit Foundation, and individual like Jeannie Newman who continuously helping our wheelchair missions through different means.