

## Letters to Editor

### Twenty Five Years Of The Lions Used Hearing Equipment Project

I am a retired aeronautical and mechanical engineer. I served for 23 years in the Royal Air Force starting my career as an apprentice and ending as engineering officer. I then became a lecturer in engineering inspection which took me too many parts of the world. I somehow drifted into collecting hearing equipment through Lions Clubs International. Thus it might be a good idea to start this article by briefly explaining what Lions Clubs International is.



Vic and Bernice Turlock

We were founded in the USA by a man called Melvyn Jones on June 17 1917. Melvyn Jones was an insurance broker and member of his local professional group. He had an idea and apparently said to himself, "What if these men, who are successful because of their drive, intelligence and ambition, were to put their talents to work improving their communities?" And so 96 years later there are 1,350,000 members, in 46,000 clubs, in over 200 countries and membership is still growing. I joined the Cambridge Club, UK, in 1982. The organization is totally funded

by the members. In the UK three ladies run the show from an office in Birmingham. 100% of all money received, less a little for expenses on that project, is returned to mainly to the local community but also to the world at large.

When an international disaster occurs Lions are there immediately to help. For instance, when the tsunami hit Sri Lanka Lions had emergency aid in place within days. On a train from Colombo to Galle three weeks later I viewed the tents erected by Lions and our friends in Rotary. Clubs in the South East of England donated funds for nine fishing boats

It was through Lions International that I started collecting old hearing equipment

In January 1989 went to a steelworks at Radcliffe, Zimbabwe to conduct training courses for The Welding Institute, just outside Cambridge, when I was an overseas lecturer in engineering inspection. The local Lion's Den was, with the golf club, the best place to enjoy a beer and a relaxing evening. And this was something I found about my worldwide wanderings that Lions Clubs were always welcoming.

However, a visit to Gweru Lions, who held their meetings in the closed down Masonic Lodge proved to be the start of the Project. Some residents in a local old peoples' home, founded by a native Rhodesian called Jairos Jiri in 1940, were in need of hearing aids and I was asked if I could I get some for them?

My wife told me I needed a haircut when I got home to Cambridge and just next to my barber was a private hearing aid center. I popped in and introduced myself to the owner Christopher Carr. That was the start of a 25 year relationship and

if it were not for him nothing would have been achieved.

We sent several parcels to Zimbabwe some of which got there. We tried the UK High Commission route for a while and a very friendly RAF Warrant Officer expedited some via the diplomatic bag. We are talking about 30 or so aids at a time. For the record we have sent hearing aids recently to Zimbabwe via a lovely lady called Dorothy in Mansfield called Dorothy, when she goes home every now and then.

When I retired from the Institute in 1996 we moved to my home town of Hastings and I expected the Project to die. However, I was asked to develop and expand it and it grew year on year until 2014

Items of equipment had been arriving and we had sent some overseas. It seemed a good idea to keep a couple of donated analyzers back so we could start checking the hearing aids ourselves. We have always tried to send working aids out because we learned from hard experience that about two thirds of all donations were only fit to recycle.

Over the years getting donations to some countries has been difficult, especially bulky equipment, and impossible sometimes. Another lesson learned was to only send out to places where they had qualified people to fit aids and have funds to supply batteries.

At the Millennium we were accepted by our Lions HQ as a British Isles and Ireland official Project. Although Hastings Lions Club was told that it would have to finance and administer it.

Also about this time we were approached or we approached by an organization called the Inside Out Trust, which was devoted to providing prisoners with training and skills for when they were released. It took a while but in February 2002 we were delighted to be at Frankland Prison, with the IOT and Starkey the hearing aid manufacturers who had trained the instructors,

for the grand opening of the sound workshop. Frankland is a modern jail that takes in only very serious offenders. In some cases they will never be released!



Photo: The prison workshop opening

This was an amazing breakthrough because as the years went by we increased from exporting 4,000 hearing aids to 12,364 in 2013. I might also say that we had 56,000 donated. Regrettably, on our 10th anniversary in February 2014 the workshop closed due to political interference. I am afraid politicians the world over constantly have bright ideas which they implement without considering the consequences. It is hoped that with the help of the Margaret Carey Foundation, the successors to the Inside Out Trust, the workshop will reopen sometime in the future.

Looking back, I have run through my files and have quite surprised myself with those early days. I think it might be appropriate to introduce you to some of our clients. For instance, we sent some hearing aids to Russian veterans in 1997 when they were made deaf in the Russian invasion of Afghanistan a few years ago. This was through Mobility International and an Irish chap based in Brussels.

Ghana appears around this time via the late John Brantuo who was the Head of the Jamasi School for the Deaf in the Ashanti. I had started

driving for the East Sussex Ambulance Service and drove to hospitals in London often. So I contacted the Ghana High Commission to see if they would courier aids for John. They said yes and I personally delivered a package to the deputy. Alas, that was the last anyone saw of them! But John came to us and we established a route for quite a while.

We established early contact with our local audiologists at The Conquest Hospital in my town of Hastings, UK. They have been a boon to us. For instance we have asked for and received audiograms of individuals needing help. There is a lady in Romania who has kept her job thanks to us and the hospital audiologists. And an old Pakistani friend Mohamed Ashraf, who was an aircraft apprentice with me in 1953, somehow got in touch and we gave him his hearing back.

In 1998 we were somehow contacted by an amazing American chap Dr. Hugh Thom, who ran Medical Missions Pacific Rim Group with his wife Ofelia based in the Philippines.

My wife and I went to the Philippines in 2004 to visit them and some clinics they were running. Sadly Hugh died soon after our visit but Ofelia carries on the good work

Maybe you have heard of All Ears Cambodia, which is run by an amazing character called Glyn Vaughan. I first met Glyn when he was an audiologist at Charring Cross Hospital in London. He filled my Honda CR-V with all sorts of useful goodies. Shortly after he resigned and started his work in Cambodia. His project has expanded and we have sent him quite a lot of aids and equipment over the years. I believe he is starting clinics in North Korea as well.



Photo: 11. Tom and Neville in 1953

My association with Sri Lanka goes back to 1953 when as a callow RAF aircraft apprentice I slept with Ceylonese apprentices! Not literally as we were three among 20 in the same barrack room! We re-established contact in 1996 when I went to Sri Lanka to train Air Lanka personnel.

In fact my wife Bernice and I have been coming back almost annually since then bringing hearing aids and equipment. We have close friends in the Lions Clubs, especially the Wellawatte West Club. We have joined them at eye camps and blood sugar monitoring clinics, having brought out donated monitors. Once we sent out some boxes of books to replace a school library in Negombo. The previous books had been eaten by insects!

Photos: 12 & 13. Clinics and school

In 2013 I was honored by the College of Orthorhinolaryngologists of Sri Lanka and presented with a lovely inscribed plaque. Only a few weeks ago Dr.Zaffarullah Wazeer , an ENT surgeons from Sri Lanka popped in for tea in Hastings to scrounge some leads for his Auricles that we had previously donated!

I was doubly honored in 2013 because Her Majesty the Queen made me a Member of the British Empire (MBE) and conferred it on me personally. It sounds an old fashioned title but is a great honor and we British are rather traditional.

There is so much more to write about. There are so many countries with many cultures and beliefs but all attempting to do their best, often in trying circumstances. In total we have donated to around 40 countries

We have even helped some people in the UK through their audiologists. One exceptional guy is Dr. Paul Whitaker, OBE who has been deaf since birth. His doctorate is in music and he runs an organization called Music for the Deaf. He and his colleague could not get the right sound from digital aids but a pair of Phonic analogues donated by us did the trick. Danavox, for instance, does not make body aids anymore. We can sometimes help people who are better served by them. It seems that those with hearing dogs do best with them.

It has been a wonderful 25 years and oh what a web of contacts we have managed to weave. We have made so many friends all around the world who we will never meet. However, regrettably the years catch up so I have been instructed by god, my medical consultant my wife (who has been my main supporter) to step down. I am missing it already.

Vic Truluck