

Freeplay Launches Lifeline Radio for Developing Countries

Cape Town, 27 March 2003....In April, the Freeplay Foundation and the Freeplay Energy Group will launch the first radio ever produced solely for humanitarian use. The Lifeline radio will be used in global communications projects that support children living on their own. The radio also will be used in programs that respond to complex emergencies, improve health and fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic, promote agricultural productivity, and advance economic progress.

The nonprofit Freeplay Foundation, established in 1998 by the Freeplay Energy Group, is committed to making radio information accessible and sustainable to the poorest of the poor via self-powered radios. Although radio is the primary means of communication in the developing world, electricity often is non-existent and the high cost of batteries makes them unaffordable, especially to women and children. The Freeplay self-powered Lifeline radio offers a solution to the problem of sustainable access.

"There are up to 15 million children who have been orphaned by AIDS or conflict in Africa. These children are in desperate need of useful information and guidance," said Kristine Pearson, executive director of the Freeplay Foundation. "The inspiration for the Lifeline design came from field research conducted with orphaned children in Rwanda, Kenya, and South Africa, so we know that special features make it an indispensable tool for even this most needy group. The Lifeline radio will bring them information on health, agriculture, animal husbandry, and life skills."

The Freeplay Energy Group, the pioneer and global leader in self-sufficient energy technology, developed the Lifeline radio as a result of the Foundation's field research in rural Africa.

"The combined knowledge between the Freeplay Energy Group and the Freeplay Foundation is very powerful," said Rory Stear, founder and CEO of the Freeplay Energy group. "We have a clear understanding of the technical and ergonomic requirements of such a product, and the need for sustainability. We are confident that the Lifeline possesses the durability and the features necessary to perform well under the most extreme conditions. This radio will enable people to receive critical information that can prevent deadly diseases, raise agricultural productivity, and provide educational instruction that could help raise the poor out of abject poverty."

With a variety of very easy to use features and controls, adults or children can use the Lifeline, irrespective of educational or cultural background. New features specific to the Lifeline model include colour coordinated knobs and dial scale that children can easily understand, the ability to wind the radio in either direction, and the ability to use any piece of wire as an antenna in case a child breaks off the original. Like other Freeplay radio models, the Lifeline offers two sustainable power sources, wind-up and solar, and is very robust, being engineered to operate in the harshest of rural conditions and climates. The multi-band radio operates on AM/FM/SW1/SW2 and receives excellent reception for as many as 40 listeners at one time.

The Freeplay Foundation already is committed to using the Lifeline radio in ten projects in Africa and Afghanistan, including those sponsored by the Voice of America, *Takalani Sesame* Street in South Africa, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Zimbabwe.

"CDC Zimbabwe, as a part of its programme of assistance to strengthen the response to HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe, works with the radio drama *Mopani Junction*, which supports behaviour change among youth and young adults," said Mark Fussell, deputy director of CDC Zimbabwe. "To encourage widespread listenership and community discussion of the issues put forward on *Mopani Junction*, we have purchased several thousand Lifeline radios for use among civil society and faith-based organizations."

Since 1996, more than 250,000 earlier Freeplay radio models have been used in at least 30 developing countries by organisations such as UNICEF, the International Red Cross, the EU and DFID.

"We have never lost sight of the immense potential of Freeplay products to change the lives of millions," said Mr. Stear. "With that in mind, we established the Freeplay Foundation, which has been able to assist thousands of people from Bosnia to Afghanistan, Mozambique to Rwanda. With its unique key features specifically designed to meet the needs of its end users, the Lifeline radio will take our humanitarian work into the next era."

The Lifeline radio is available to aid and donor agencies that support humanitarian projects, but will not be sold commercially.

Donors to the Freeplay Foundation for the development of the Lifeline radio include the Anglo American Corporation, the Body Shop Foundation, NASDAQ, and the Vodafone Group Foundation.

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Key Design Features:

- Exceptional sound quality and projection: enables community listening for groups of up to 40 people, ideal for distance education and emergency relief.
- Long playtime: a 30-second wind of the handle will yield up to 30 minutes of playtime. In direct sunlight, the radio will play continuously off the solar panel.
- Colour coordinated knobs and dial scale: the use of colour on the dial scale and knobs eases understanding for less technologically advanced users.
- Winding handle which can be wound in either direction: earlier generation Freeplay radios were limited to a clock-wise wind, which in some cases led to breakage.
- Replaceable antenna: can be easily removed or replaced with any piece of wire.
- Detachable solar panel with a 3-metre lead: allows the radio to be placed in the shade with the user, whilst the panel charges in the sun.
- Rugged casing: will withstand harsh climatic conditions and rough handling.
- Easy-to-carry handle: facilitates portability as users usually carry the radio with them to listen throughout the day.

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